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A Phenomenological Exploration of Korean Adoptees' Multiple Minority Identities

Abstract

Since the end of the Korean War, Korean children have been placed for international adoption due to their marginalized status in South Korea. In the United States, Korean children have predominantly been adopted to White families through transracial adoption (Bergquist, 2003; Lee, 2003). Transracial adoption describes the process of children being placed in a home where there are racial differences with one or both adoptive parents. Through international transracial adoption, Korean adoptees may undergo events that impact the salience and development of multiple minority identities, including: racial, ethnic, cultural, and as an adoptee. These experiences may be shaped by interactions with socialization/reculturation experiences with race, culture, or ethnicity; minority distress; or difficulties coping with mental health concerns. Moreover, Korean adoptees confront an array of legal, cultural, and social barriers stemming from their minority identities in either their adoptive country or birth country. Based on the multifaceted experiences and backgrounds of Korean adoptees, this study utilized an interpretative phenomenological approach that identified eleven themes: Coping with Adoption; Experiences Around Visiting Korea; Identity; Mental Health; Minority Distress; Personal Values; Reactions to Participation; Relationships; Self-Beliefs; Social Support; and Strengths. The study highlighted the Korean adoptees sense making and recall of significant experiences over the course of a lifespan. The participants also depicted their interactions within numerous settings and contexts as Korean adoptees in the United States and Korea. The theory of intersectionality was critical to contextualize the individual differences, multiple minority identities, and the individual's interactions with social and cultural oppression. The implications for the research are noted for clinical and training purposes. These include how the data can inform clinical decision-making when integrating the Korean adoptees' strengths, values, multicultural considerations, and processing meaningful experiences. There are additional research directions that could continue to progress the research with Korean and international adoptees as well. Lastly, it touches on how this project was personally meaningful and important for me to complete.

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF KOREAN ADOPTEES' MULTIPLE MINORITY IDENTITIES

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Jared Utley

August 2020

Advisor: Dr. Ruth Chao

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Abstract

Since the end of the Korean War, Korean children have been placed for international adoption due to their marginalized status in South Korea. In the United States, Korean children have predominantly been adopted to White families through transracial adoption (Bergquist, 2003; Lee, 2003). Transracial adoption describes the process of children being placed in a home where there are racial differences with one or both adoptive parents. Through international transracial adoption, Korean adoptees may undergo events that impact the salience and development of multiple minority identities, including: racial, ethnic, cultural, and as an adoptee. These experiences may be shaped by interactions with socialization/reculturation experiences with race, culture, or ethnicity; minority distress; or difficulties coping with mental health concerns. Moreover, Korean adoptees confront an array of legal, cultural, and social barriers stemming from their minority identities in either their adoptive country or birth country. Based on the multifaceted experiences and backgrounds of Korean adoptees, this study utilized an interpretative phenomenological approach that identified eleven themes: Coping with Adoption; Experiences Around Visiting Korea; Identity; Mental Health; Minority Distress; Personal Values; Reactions to Participation; Relationships; Self-Beliefs; Social Support; and Strengths. The study highlighted the Korean adoptees sense making and recall of significant experiences over the course of a lifespan. The participants also depicted their interactions within numerous settings and contexts as Korean adoptees in the United States and Korea. The theory of intersectionality was

critical to contextualize the individual differences, multiple minority identities, and the individual's interactions with social and cultural oppression. The implications for the research are noted for clinical and training purposes. These include how the data can inform clinical decision-making when integrating the Korean adoptees' strengths, values, multicultural considerations, and processing meaningful experiences. There are additional research directions that could continue to progress the research with Korean and international adoptees as well. Lastly, it touches on how this project was personally meaningful and important for me to complete.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of Korean International Adoption in the United States

Within the United States, international adoption largely stemmed from war and conflict that occurred in World War Two and the Korean War (Silverman, 1993). International adoption in the United States grew in popularity due to: a lack of White children in domestic adoption, infertility, and seeking children who were of younger ages (Roberts, 2006 p. 51). Since the 1950s, approximately half a million children have been adopted internationally into the United States, with 85 percent occurring through transracial placements (Selman, 2012). Korean international adoptees (will be noted as Korean adoptees for the rest of the paper) represent about one quarter of all international adoptees and 10 percent of the Korean population living in the United States (Kim, 2013).

The Korean government supported international adoption due to the difficult economic and social conditions following the Korean War in the 1950s (Lee, 2003). Moreover, cultural norms and traditions have historically marginalized single and unwed mothers, such as the lack of economic support, absent social services, and scorn from family members (Kim, 2007). The South Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare (2014) noted children born from unwed mothers accounted for 90 percent of all Korean international adoptions. Selman (2012) also noted that approximately 200,000 Korean

children have been adopted internationally, with over 100,000 Korean children adopted within the United States. More recently from 1999 to 2017, the U.S. State Department reported 20,594 international adoptions were completed from South Korea to the United States (Adoption Statistics, n.d.).

Each Korean adoptee's journey is unique and has been influenced by an assortment of different environmental, psychological, and relational factors (Lee, 2003). However, common experiences have been noted with samples of Korean adoptees. For instance, Barroso, et al., (2017) noted that through international adoption, Korean adoptees experience disconnection from their birth country and culture of origin. Moreover, Korean adoptees undergo the severance of relational and biological ties from their birth family and are forcefully placed in a new country with new adoptive parents (Barroso, et al., 2017).

As Korean adoptees lose attachment with their birth country, they begin to develop a new bond with their adoptive family and their adoptive country (Ferrari, et al., 2017). Following the separation from their birth country, Korean adoptees acquire cultural knowledge and linguistic mastery to assimilate into the culture of their adoptive parents (Ferrari, et al., 2017). As children and adults, Korean adoptees commonly lack information about their adoption, biological family members, or pre-adoption narratives (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler & Esau, 2000). However, the extensive history of Korean international adoption has contributed to increasing awareness and growing resources for Korean adoptees (Lee, 2016).

Korean adoptees have attempted to utilize opportunities to pursue information, socialization experiences, and immersion within other minority communities and the Korean culture (Lee, 2016). Through the rest of the introduction, I intend to introduce the general topics of interest when exploring the experiences of Korean adoptees.

Multiple Minority Identities

Korean adoptees interact with an assortment of minority identities tied to their adoption, race, culture, and ethnicity. Research has noted variation in the levels of Korean adoptees' self-identification based on ethnic, adoptee, racial, and cultural identity (Beaupre, et al., 2015; Bergquist, 2003; Wickes & Slate, 1997). Moreover, Bergquist (2003) noted that Korean adoptees exhibited adaptability when integrating or creating distance between multiple social and cultural identities. Korean adoptees also undergo continuous efforts to acknowledge and balance their level of connectedness with the culture of their adoptive parents, birth parents, and other Korean adoptee peers (Bergquist, 2003). Research has noted that minority self-identification can undergo changes over time based on increased exposure to socialization and reculturation experiences (McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, & Howard, 2009).

Moreover, Korean adoptees encounter various contexts or settings that alter the salience of one or multiple identities (Jo, 2006, p. 286). The salience of these identities appears linked to general experiences with socialization, reculturation, and minority distress (Grotevant, et al., 2000). Korean adoptees have also reported shifts in the salience of multiple minority identities due to life transitions or notable life events (Lee, Yun, Yoo, & Nelson, 2010). Rapid or quick fluctuations with identity also appear to be specifically linked with the immediate environment or setting (Jo, 2006, p. 287). One

example of shifting identity salience occurs when Korean adoptees interact with experiences of marginalization. Research has noted that the salience of multiple minority identities increased in prominence when they were the basis for being othered or discriminated against (Feigelman, 2000; Walton, 2015). Encounters with minority stress or socialization appeared to also shape the increased exploration or foreclosure of self-identification within specific settings or contexts (Tan & Nakkula, 2004). In regards to intersectionality, Pearson (2010) wrote about how she identified with multiple minority identities. Moreover, she noted how her self-identification also influenced her experiences of oppression and distress within cultural and social systems (Pearson, 2010).

Socialization/Reculturation Experiences

Socialization is a broad term that will be used to describe experiences when Korean adoptees engage with different cultures, groups of people, and other environments. These individuals can potentially experience socialization events that simultaneously impact distinct social and cultural identities (Song & Lee, 2009). Song and Lee (2009) noted that different age periods can also impact the source and degree of socialization that occur. Levels of socialization have been positively linked with transracial adoptees' minority identity levels (Song & Lee, 2009); well-being (Lee & Quintana, 2005); and personal growth (Sarubbi, Block-Lerner, Moon, & Williams, 2012).

Korean adoptees experience an assortment of socialization experiences as children when transitioning from their birth country to their adoptive country. Baden, Treweeke, and Ahluwalia (2012) reported several stages within their model of reculturation during childhood. These phases represent the end of interacting with the culture of their birth country and the start of assimilating into the culture of their adoptive

parents (Baden, et al., 2012). Korean adoptees adapt to the culture of their adoptive family for several reasons: developing the new parent-child relationship, their primary source of socialization, and the absence of cultural information from their birth country (Baden, et al., 2012; Lee, 2003). Korean child and adolescent adoptees may receive exposure to diversity through local neighborhood activities, groups, and personal relationships (Thomas & Tessler, 2007). Moreover, research has been conducted with Korean cultural camps that focus on providing socialization experiences for Korean adoptees and their families. The cultural camps have been developed to expose Korean adoptees to cultural, ethnic, racial, and adoptee information and support, but with mixed empirical support (Lee, 2016; Ramsey & Mika, 2011; Randolph & Holtzman, 2010).

Following the conclusion of adolescence and entering into early adulthood, Korean adoptees who seek socialization activities are in the last stage of the reculturation model noted by Baden, et al., (2012). Reculturation represents the degree of independent engagement with the Korean culture or the development of memberships with groups that share cultural, ethnic, racial, or adoptee identities (Baden, et al., 2012). Research has noted that reculturation for Korean adoptees occurs in an assortment of ways: college or language classes (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Meier, 1999); Asian American group participation (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008); in South Korea (Kim, 2013); or among Korean adoptee communities (Ramsey & Mika, 2011). Moreover, Korean adoptees may seek reculturation by visiting South Korea through organized tours, birth family searches, or cultural immersion (Bergquist, 2003; Kim, 2013). However, some members of this community may not participate in reculturation activities and reported amotivation when exploring multiple minority identities (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Minority Stress

Minority stress, will describe perceived or actual experiences of invalidation or marginalization related to one or multiple minority identities (Mays & Cochran, 2001). Common examples of minority stress occur through instances of discrimination, racism, stereotyping, and prejudice (Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003; Walton, Priest, & Paradies, 2013). Korean adoptees encounter minority stress from societal or cultural norms, family members, peers, or members of minority communities (Kim, Suyemoto, & Turner, 2010; Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Baden, et al., 2012). Korean adoptees have noted that feeling othered within their adoptive family is related to their adoptee identity or their physical appearance (Ramsey & Mika, 2011). However, invalidating or marginalizing comments from Korean Americans or native South Koreans originates from the level of authenticity regarding their racial, ethnic, or cultural identities (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Diaz-Guerrero (1979) reported individuals may utilize active or passive coping when experiencing minority distress. For instance, Korean adoptees who demonstrate passive coping may minimize their social and cultural identities or the importance of diversity considerations (Langrehr, Yoon, Hacker, & Caudill, 2015). However, Korean adoptees that pursue proactive coping strategies would seek affiliation with primarily minority communities or confront people and environments that attempt to silence their self-identification (Langrehr, et al., 2015). For Korean adoptees, levels of ethnic identity (Kim, et al., 2010); sources of relational support (Ramsey & Mika, 2011); and socialization experiences (Lee, Lee, Hu, & Kim, 2015) have all been positively linked with adaptive coping when faced with minority stress.

Korean adoptees who face minority stress may also experience psychological distress and other poor outcomes. For instance, among Asian American samples there were positive relationships found between instances of discrimination with severity of anxiety and depression symptoms (Cassidy, O'Connor, Howe, & Warden, 2004) along with physical health concerns (Lee & Ahn, 2011). Moreover, instances of minority stress have also been linked to problem behaviors, social isolation, and substance abuse by Korean adoptees (Lee, et al., 2015). Among a sample of international adoptees, instances of minority stress were also negatively associated with self-esteem (Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2007). It is important to survey how Korean adoptees cope with minority stress and identify protective factors that reduce its maladaptive impact on mental and physical health.

Distress Outcomes

Adoptees have been a historically pathologized group in regards to mental health outcomes and problem behaviors. Palacios and Brodzinsky (2010) noted the disparity among adoptees and non-adoptees was negligible among the vast majority of both groups, with discordant outcomes occurring at the extreme ends of the samples (Roskam & Stievenart, 2014). Experiences with distress for adoptees may originate from a lack of information about their birth family; feelings of loss or rejection; and trauma from familial or cultural disconnection (Meier, 1999; Grotevant, 1997). Research has been conducted with multiple adoptee populations to measure mental health and behavior outcomes. Specifically for Korean adoptees, measures of well-being were positively associated with cultural socialization and catharsis from processing their adoption narrative (Basow, Lilley, Bookawala, & McGillicuddy-Delisi, 2008). Well-being and

self-esteem were also positively correlated with levels of ethnic identity with the same sample (Basow, et al., 2008). Moreover, life satisfaction for Korean adoptees was significantly lower for adults who reported low scores on ethnic and adoptee identities versus other clusters who recorded moderate or high scores on adoptive and ethnic identity levels (Beaupre, et al., 2015). Additional research conducted using samples of transracial and international adoptees may also be informative for distress outcomes for this population.

Addressing the Needs from Previous Research

Despite extensive research with Korean adoptees and other adoptee groups, there are significant gaps noted in the literature that I attempted to address in this study. One important research sub-question is exploring and understanding the experiences of Korean adoptees as multiple minority individuals. Research with Korean adoptees have utilized an assortment of different identity measures, such as race, adoptee, ethnicity, and even cultural identity (Beaupre, et al., 2015; Baden & Steward, 2000; Suyemoto, 2002; Kim, et al., 2010). However, these studies have utilized labels of identity that describe static levels of identification. Research with Korean adoptees lacks information that describes how multiple minority identities are integrated and potentially evolve throughout adulthood (Kim, et al., 2010). Moreover, previous qualitative literature does not contain description and interpretation of the reciprocal relationship that occurs between the context and self-identification for individuals with multiple minority identities.

Another essential sub research question concerns the meaning making process of identity salience among Korean adoptees. Langrehr, Hacker, Yoon, and Caudill (2015) offered in their future research section that ongoing academic inquiry should address within-group differences regarding the negotiation of intersecting multiple identities within different contexts. In this research study, I sought to understand what occurs for Korean adoptees when there are shifts in identity salience due to changes in environments or settings (Westhues & Cohen, 1998; Lee, et al., 2010). One context that appears salient for Korean adoptees are encounters with minority stress. There is a lack of research that explores the subjective accounts of Korean adoptees when recalling how minority stress impacts minority identity salience. Moreover, I planned to address the impact of minority stress regarding the participants self-identification with marginalized identities.

Korean adoptees may face multiple sources of minority distress due to their transracial and international adoption. For instance, Fisher (2003) reported that adoptees face stigma and prejudice due to being part of a non-normative nuclear family from other relatives or peers. Moreover, Korean adoptees may also face minority stress from native South Koreans over the lack of biological blood lines or the inhibited connection with their cultural heritage (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). One sub research question sought to investigate how Korean adoptees responded to marginalization when it targets specific minority identities. Moreover, I wanted to capture the feelings and thoughts following those moments to further understand how different contexts or sources of minority stress affect Korean adoptees' ability to cope. This may be particularly relevant for Korean adoptees who engage with multiple cultural, social, and legal systems that shape encounters with minority stress.

Studies have linked different psychological factors with mental and behavioral distress among adoptee populations. For instance, self-esteem among Korean adoptees has been positively associated with race, ethnicity, cultural, and adoptee identity levels (Basow, et al., 2008; Yoon, 2000; Beaupre, et al., 2015). Moreover, ethnic identity and pride among a sample of Korean adoptees was negatively related to psychological distress, including symptoms of depression and anxiety (Yoon, 2000). I attempted to address a void in the research by examining how counseling psychologists can effectively assist Korean adoptees through practice and training. Using the sense making process and direct responses of the Korean adoptee participants, I hoped to describe and interpret the potential roles counseling psychologists can efficaciously assume when interacting with this community (Smith, et al., 2009). These practitioners have tremendous tools and training to provide support to Korean adoptees (Vera & Speight, 2003). Moreover, counseling psychologists can create and promote experiences that empower minority populations individually and collectively (Vera & Speight, 2003). I wanted to capture how Korean adoptees describe meaningful and resilient experiences that reflect a strengths-based and inclusive approach within counseling psychology.

Research has shown that Korean adoptees demonstrate a tendency to engage with the South Korean culture through reculturation experiences (Baden, et al., 2012). Reculturation events can also prompt individuals to acknowledge and process the loss, hurt, and isolation that occurred with their birth country (Baden & Steward, 2000). Through a sub research question, I wanted to discuss the relationship between reculturation/socialization experiences and the meaning making process for Korean adoptees. Langrehr, et al., (2015) noted future research was needed with Korean

adoptees who explored socialization with their birth culture throughout their lifespan. There was important information from the interviews with Korean adoptees that detailed the significance of interacting with the culture, ethnicity, and race of their birth country as adult adoptees. Moreover, the responses from the interviewees reflected how their adoption narrative has shaped what is meaningful and of value in their adult lives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the shared experiences of Korean adoptees through the lenses of multiple minority identities, socialization and reculturation experiences, minority distress, and distress. This will be the first proposed research study conducted with Korean adoptees that uses interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to address the theory of intersectionality within counseling psychology (Shin, et al., 2017). After a careful review, there have been no research studies with Korean adoptees that have utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Moreover, there have been no studies conducted using IPA when the interviewer and participants both identify as Korean adoptees. Counseling psychology also lacks scholarship using the theory of intersectionality. For instance, following a content analysis of 6,715 total articles from the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* and *The Counseling Psychologist*, only .60 percent (40 articles) met the criteria for strong intersectional scholarship (Grzanka, Santos, & Moradi, 2017). Strong intersectionality research reports a critical and constructive description of individual and group interaction with societal and structural inequality (Dill & Kohlman, 2012, p. 157).

The novelty in the methodological and theoretical approach presented important findings regarding the sense making process and identification of meaningful experiences for Korean adoptees not previously documented.

I hoped to use the theory of intersectionality to offer a theoretical framework to elaborate on the dynamics of individuals with multiple minority identities and their interactions with personal and systemic oppression (Warner, 2008). Moreover, collecting qualitative data with IPA elevated awareness regarding the collective experiences of Korean adoptees using direct quotes and meaningful responses (Smith et al., 2009). The flexibility with description and interpretation with IPA encouraged the illustration of dynamic and complex concepts that were the foci of this study. Using the voices of the participants, I hoped to highlight how counseling psychology can potentially address clinical and training when serving this marginalized community (Vera & Speight, 2003). Through an inclusive and strengths-based approach, I planned to empower the participants' expression of individual and communal needs (Renn, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003). Overall, my goal was to authentically capture the sense making process and the meaningful essence associated with being a Korean adoptee (Smith, et al., 2009).
My primary research question was: what are the shared experiences of Korean adoptees with multiple minority identities over the course of the lifespan?

Research sub-questions:

1. How do Korean adoptees make sense of their experience as multiple minority individuals?

2. What is the relationship between reculturation/socialization experiences and meaning making?

3. How do Korean adoptees understand the experience of identity salience and intersectionality of identity?

a. How is experience of identity salience different when it occurs from minority distress?

4. What is the experience for a Korean adoptee when faced with minority distress?

a. What is the application of the theory of intersectionality with systemic or personalized experiences of minority distress?

5. How can counseling psychologists provide a strengths-based approach when assisting Korean adoptee groups?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, there is a theoretical and empirical research review related to the experiences of Korean adoptees in the United States. The first section will address background information concerning international and transracial adoption in the United States and South Korea. The second section will detail the philosophical framework using the theory of intersectionality. The third section will describe important factors and experiences related to possessing multiple minority identities. The fourth section addresses the sources and the impacts of different socialization and reculturation experiences Korean adoptees may encounter. The fifth section describes what minority stress is and its applicability to Korean adoptees. Lastly, the literature review concludes with scholarly work that documents distress variables and addresses mental health considerations relevant for Korean adoptees. All of the sections were developed to provide important contextual information related to the shared lived experiences of Korean adoptees.

Adoption: Background Information

International adoption is a process when a child is placed with a stable family when there are no opportunities for fixed placement within their country of origin (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005). Adoptees may be given up for a variety of different reasons, whether related to absent or abusive parenting, due to being born with developmental

disabilities, or behavioral difficulties (Friedlander, 2003). Moreover, international adoption may also be affected by the economic support and social services offered to single or unwed mothers within the birth country (Kim, 2007). Prior to their adoption placement, international adoptees may experience multiple placements within orphanages or foster families (Baden, et al., 2012). New policies in international adoption request the adoptive parent(s) to meet their adopted child in their birth country, confirm the adoption process, and obtain visa paperwork for their newly adopted child (Baden, et al., 2012).

International adoptees may be placed in in-racial or transracial placements (Grotevant, et al., 2000). Transracial adoption is noted as differences in race between one or more adoptive parents and the adopted child when creating a new family system (Silverman, 1993). Most transracial adoption placements include White or Caucasian parents either through domestic or international adoptions (Baden, et al., 2012; Lee, 2003). This type of adoption between racial or ethnically different adoptees and their adoptive parents are noted as the "most visible" placements (Grotevant, et al., 2000). Transracial adoption represents a non-traditional avenue for creating a family due to the child not sharing physical features or biological blood lines with adoptive family members (Ifekwunigwe, 2004, p. 188). Specifically, transracial Korean adoptees possess contrasting features from their majority white adoptive parents due to the lack of shared physical, biological, cultural, linguistic, and adoptee statuses (Baden, et al., 2012). The adoption process involves isolating a person from their original community or group members and forcing them to assimilate into a new familial and cultural community (Ferrari, et al., 2017).

International Adoption within the United States

In the United States, transracial international adoptions began following the end of World War Two. It began with children born in Japan and China adopted by military members and their families (Silverman, 1993). International adoption in the United States from Asian countries was also the result of both the Korean War and the Vietnam War (Bergquist, 2003). In addition, economic and political unrest spurred the adoption of children from Russia, Latin America, and Southeast Asia (Bergquist, 2003). Additional reasons for international adoption within the United States stems from disinterest in foster care, increased attention toward adoption of infants versus older youth, and the lack of domestic adoption programs established within birth countries (Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt & Gunnar, 2006). Transracial adoptions in the United States became increasingly popular due to a lack of white children within the domestic adoption system and increasing levels of adult infertility (Roberts, 2006, p. 51)

Since the 1950s, there have been a reported 500,000 international adoption placements in the United States with 85 percent of those children being placed in transracial families (Selman, 2012; Vandivere, Malm, & Radel, 2009). Lee (2003) noted that acceptance of certain international adoptees has fluctuated based on issues with child trafficking and child labor. Concerns related to the welfare of adoptees contributed to the development of international regulations, such as the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect to Intercountry Adoption of 1993 (Lee, 2003). The United States also developed the Intercountry Adoption Act and Child Citizenship Act of 2000 to increase an international adoptees' rights and their pathway to citizenship (Lee, 2003).

Korean International Adoption

Specifically, the South Korean government strongly encouraged the international adoption of their youth following the conclusion of the Korean War in the mid 1950s (Bergquist, 2003). During the aftermath of the Korean War, American soldiers brought home orphaned South Korean male children as 'mascots' (Kim, 2008). Abandoned or lost, South Korean children were objectified and required assistance (Kim, 2008). American soldiers were identified as saviors and facilitated the development of orphanages and raised money to support the needs of these South Korean children (Kim, 2008). In 1954, the Refugee Relief Act permitted orphans and multiracial South Korean children to be adopted by their father's country of citizenship (Kim, 1995). The notoriety following the conclusion of the Korean War led to the increased interest in South Korean international adoption by families in the United States; particularly after witnessing Bertha and Harry Holt adopt eight South Korean youth (Kim, 2007). More recently, international adoption was noted as a mechanism for satisfying the economic and familial needs of potential parents in Westernized countries (Waddell, 2017).

The South Korean government cited several different reasons for encouraging international adoptions following the conclusion of the Korean War. South Korea experienced extreme hardships related to poor economic, political, and social conditions (Lee, 2003). This resulted in the lack of resources and services provided to at-risk and marginalized communities within South Korea's society. One example included children from multi-racial couples. The South Korean government believed that children from multi-racial couples born from the result of the Korean War were an obstacle for nationalistic goals (Waddell, 2017).

Kim (2007) reported that the Korean government actively pressured birth parents to surrender their multi-racial children to actively supply the economic and cultural agenda of the country.

From 1972-1978 and 1980-1987, international adoptions from South Korea alone accounted for greater than 50 percent of all international adoptions in the United States (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). In 1978, it accounted for 74.2 percent, the highest percentage within the history of South Korean international adoption to the United States (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Within South Korea, increases in international adoption during the 1970s and 1980s were caused by financial incentives, single parents' inability to access resources, and the infrequency of abortions (Kim, 1995). Perceptions regarding the international adoption program in South Korea changed following the Seoul Olympics in 1988. The South Korean government sought to reduce their international adoption program because of the negative publicity it received internationally during the Olympic Games (Kim, 1995; Prebin, 2008). From 1988 to 1993, the South Korean government reduced the number of international adoptions to the United States from 3,552 to 1,765 (Kim, 1995). This downward trend has continued since the 1988. More recently, the U.S. State Department reported from 1999 to 2017 that only 20,594 Korean international adoptions occurred from South Korea to the United States (Adoption Statistics, n.d.).

The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption was developed in 1993 to protect the rights and freedoms of international adoption throughout the world (Ma, 2017). The Hague Convention had important principles that emphasized prioritizing the positive well-being of the adopted children, responding to their basic human rights, and developing policies that emphasized

the importance of maintaining ties with biological family members (Ma, 2017). 18 years later, South Korea agreed to join the international treaty, but has yet to ratify or integrate its policies within their international adoption programs and agencies (Ma, 2017). The South Korean government has attempted to increase support for Korean adult adoptees by passing the 1995 Special Act Relating to the Promotion and Procedure of Adoption (Kim, 2007). This bill was passed and enacted to ease Korean adult adoptee attempts to develop cultural or familial roots in South Korea (Ma, 2017). More specifically, it required adoption agencies to offer post-adoption services and resources for Korean adult adoptees and their adoptive families (Ma, 2017). South Korea also established Korea Adoption Services, an organization that attempts to coordinate adoption resources and organize adoption information. However, the Korean Adoption Services organization has and continues to face strong opposition by private adoption agencies that are reluctant to distribute sensitive adoption information externally (Ma, 2017).

Throughout the history of international adoption in South Korea, unwed mothers have been participants in the development and maintenance of the international adoption program. The South Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare (2014) reported that over 90 percent of the international adoptees were born from unwed mothers. There were multiple reasons for why unwed mothers have been the primary sources of international adoptions in South Korea. This group of women has faced extreme difficulties, including the lack of social services, economic support, and cultural protections (Kim, 2007). Prebin (2008) noted that single-women in South Korea faced barriers to keeping their children such as: age, social, and familial pressure. Moreover, these birth mothers encounter extreme scorn and stigma for having a child out of wedlock. Unwed mothers

attempt to hide their pregnancies and privately submit their child into the social welfare system to protect themselves and the child from marginalization (Kim, 2007). If these children are submitted to social services and adoption, they were permanently labeled as abandoned and automatically categorized as a lower-class citizen within the South Korean culture (Kim, 2005, p. 66). These cultural and social expectancies promoted international adoption and hurt domestic adoption where the continuance of bloodlines within families is still idealized (Kim, 2005, p. 73).

Philosophical Framework

Intersectionality was initially noted and defined by Crenshaw (1989), when black feminists believed their experiences were going unheard and unrepresented during the overall feminist movement. These black feminists voiced their interactions with racial and classist specific issues that were additional social and cultural barriers as a sub-group of women (Nadan, et al., 2015). Intersectionality has been broadened to include various social and cultural identities, such as race, sexual orientation, and spiritual beliefs (Nadan, et al., 2015).

Intersectionality theory highlights the importance of one or more cultural or social identities within an individual's experience. There are three principles of intersectionality noted by Nadan, et al., (2015), the first highlights within-group differences among social and cultural groups. Secondly, there is variation within power structures that contribute to marginalization for specific groups seeking access and opportunity (Nadan, et al., 2015). Lastly, individuals may openly identify with one or more social and cultural groups simultaneously (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). Moreover, there is a strong emphasis on integrating the influence of context when

discussing experiences with multiple identities (Nadan, et al., 2015). The macro-level systemic considerations involve the inclusion of historical, social, political, and institutional factors when exploring the collective experiences of individuals with multiple social and cultural identities (Nadan, et al., 2015). The micro-systemic aspects for an individual detail the connections formed between social and cultural identities, while understanding the personal and psychological effect of being confronted by systemic or personalized oppression (Nadan, et al., 2015).

An important feature within the theory of intersectionality noted earlier by Nadan, et al., (2015) were disparities experienced by different groups and individuals. These disparities stem from interactions with power and societal structures that influence experiences with privilege or oppression on a continuum (Nadan, et al., 2015). Through the prism of intersectionality, we seek to understand the cumulative mechanisms of minority distress for individuals with multiple minority identities. Moreover, it is imperative to examine how systems of power and oppression within historical, cultural, and social contexts continue to shape distress for individuals within minority communities (Nadan, et al., 2015). These continual experiences with marginalization produce disparities among individuals and communities over time (Nadan, et al., 2015). The theory of intersectionality appears applicable for Korean adoptees who experience distress due to multiple minority identities from dominant and minority cultural, racial, and ethnic groups (Meier, 1999). Moreover, these interactions may occur within the context of social and cultural systems in their adoptive country or their birth country. Korean adoptees may variably report their experiences based on the environment and the underpinned co-existing systems of power and privilege.

Another important consideration when attempting to understand the shared lived experiences of Korean adoptees is through the lens of identity salience. Using the theory of intersectionality, the incorporation of contextual variables is essential to examine the reciprocal impact between the setting and self-identification (Warner, 2008). Identities may be heightened, consistent, or silenced based on the setting or people present (Warner, 2008). Moreover, individuals with minority identities are susceptible to experiencing feelings of isolation and marginalization versus individuals with dominant or socially accepted identities (Warner, 2008; Lee, 2003). The dynamic nature of Korean adoptees' multiple minority identities with changing contexts influences their communal and individualized experiences. Studies have demonstrated that identity salience for Korean adoptees may be dependent on age (Meier, 1999); instances of minority distress (Kim et al., 2010) or levels of socialization with culture, race, or ethnicity (Darnell, et al., 2017). Korean adoptees may integrate a plethora of strategies to inhibit or highlight the prominence of their cultural and social identities over their lifetime (Docan-Morgan, 2010). The theory of intersectionality is applicable for Korean adoptees in regards to multiple minority identities, the impact of context on identity salience, and confrontations with minority distress (McGinnis, et al., 2009; Baden, et al., 2012).

Introduction to Social and Cultural Identities for Korean Adoptees

For Korean adoptees, there may be an assortment of relevant social and cultural identities associated with their personal adoption narratives, adoptive family, or experiences with minority distress. Also, there may be a mixture of factors that have impacted their development, salience, or integration across the lifespan. When referring to adoption identity it was defined by Grotevant (1997) using three aspects: self-

definition, coherence of personality, and continuity of personality over time. Self-definition was described as individual or group identification based on the adoptee's personality style, social groups, or positions (Grotevant, 1997). Coherence of personality was co-constructed between the adoptee's subjective experience and encounters with environmental factors that contributed to an adoptee's personal sense of meaning (Grotevant, 1997). Lastly, continuity of personality over time detailed the cohesiveness of a person's attitudes, values, and behaviors over the lifetime of the adoptee (Grotevant, 1997) and within the context of introspection (Beaupre, et al., 2015).

Phinney (1990) defined ethnic identity as the strength of an attitude toward an individual's ethnic group, self-identification with customs and norms, degree of membership, exposure, and active engagement with other individuals within those communities (Umana-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bamaca-Gomez, 2004; Helms, 1995, p. 183). Racial identity was defined as the grouping or categorizing of individuals based primarily on their physical appearance or characteristics (Helms, 1995, p. 182). Friedlander, et al., (2000) reported that adoptees also experienced bicultural identity, defined as the knowledge and awareness of rules, expectations, and differences among two or more cultural groups or communities.

Korean adoptees may be also influenced by the construct of biculturalism. Bicultural competence was defined by Lafromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) as the development of a meaningful life among two groups and validating two or more cultural identities. In addition, bicultural processes related to identity development may include multiple cultural expectancies, value identification, along with feelings of pride, connectedness to the culture, and sense of heritage (Lafromboise, et al., 1993).

Moreover, each individual can have a weak, moderate or strong relationship with one or more cultural groups during this continuous process (Berry, 1990). Berry (1990) noted that a higher level of identification with two or more cultural groups was characterized as integration or biculturalism; identification with no cultural group depicted marginality; sole recognition with the dominant culture was assimilation; and the singular recognition of the person's cultural background group was separation.

The combination of the adoptive, racial, cultural, and ethnic identities can contribute strongly to an individual's sense of self and overall identity (Wickes & Slate, 1997; Bergquist, 2003). Contextual factors may also impact the salience of one or more cultural and social identities separately or simultaneously for Korean adoptees. This is counter to the linear and non-intersecting portrayals of identity salience and development. Korean adoptees may self-identify in a myriad of different ways. When asked about their ethnic identity, Bergquist (2003) reported Korean adoptees self-identified as either Korean or Korean American (Korean or Korean Americans will refer to South Koreans or descendents of South Korea for the rest of the paper). Kim, et al., (2010) reported through interviews that Korean adoptees self-identified as American, Asian American, racially Asian, ethnically or culturally American or Korean, and as an adoptee within their sample.

Phinney (1990) noted that identity may be influenced by the group membership of the individual and exposure to diverse populations. For instance, Kim, Reichwald, and Lee (2013) noted that Korean adoptees who experienced a sense of connectedness with their cultural roots noted higher levels of ethnic identity development.

Additional factors that influenced multiple minority identity development were linked to socialization with race, culture, and ethnicity; personal identification with their adoptee narrative; or views based on their overall identity and other individual experiences (Kim, et al., 2010)

Salience of Korean Adoptee Identities

The development and salience of Korean adoptees' multiple identities may be more nuanced based on the environment or particular context than a normative identity developmental pathway. Grotevant (1997) explained that the development of identity takes place due to the relationship between the person's core personality and the changing context over the course of an adoptee's lifetime. The contextual variables that impact a Korean adoptee identity development may include cultural, social, and familial factors (Darnell, Johansen, Tavakoli, & Brugone, 2017). Korean adoptees may confront reinforcing and punishing experiences from broader cultural and social expectancies, individuals, or groups regarding identity (Grotevant, et al., 2000). Moreover, the current setting or context may impact the salience of one or more identities differently (Jo, 2006, p. 287). For instance, within a sample of Canadian international transracial adoptees, 50 percent identified as Canadian and 10 percent identified themselves as White despite being born in Haiti, South Korea or Bangladesh (Westhues & Cohen, 1997).

Researchers have found differences for transracial adoptees versus same-race adoptees and other minority groups in terms of ethnic and racial identity levels. For instance, Hollingsworth (1997) reported that transracial adoptees had significantly lower ratings of ethnic and racial identity than same-race adoptees. Transracial adoptees also

experienced depressed levels of ethnic and racial identity when placed with two parents who did not shared their same racial or ethnic identity (McRoy, 1991; Bagley, 1991, p. 58). Lee, et al., (2010) noted that South Korean immigrants and Korean Americans reported significantly higher scores on ethnic identification than Korean adoptees, but all three groups demonstrated positive associations among: ethnic identity, positive affect toward ethnicity, and well-being.

There have been studies completed with adoptees that addressed the importance or salience of at least one minority identity. Benson, Sharma, and Roehlkepartain (1994) noted that 41 percent of adoptees in their sample endorsed thoughts related to adoption at least 2-3 times per month and 27 percent reported that their adoptee narrative was a significant aspect of their self-concept. Moreover, within a sample of international adoptee adolescents and early adults, 46 percent of women and 44 percent of men noted their ethnicity was either very important or important (Westhues & Cohen, 1998). Within the same sample, Westhues and Cohen (1998) also reported that 46 percent of men and 42 percent of women noted that race was either very important or important. These results appear to offer variation for adoptees in terms of the salience or importance of their ethnic, racial, or adoptee identities.

Salience of Identity Related to Age

One important factor to consider for minority identity salience is the age of the Korean adoptee. Adoptees over time increase their breadth of experience through cognitions, feelings, and physical changes (Brodzinsky, 1990, p. 6). Moreover, they noted this process may fluctuate between accepting and denying minority identities over the course of their lifetime (Wilkinson, 1985, p. 29). Meier (1999) found most Korean

adoptees experienced denial related to their "Koreanness" as a child and adolescent; intuitive exploration regarding racial experiences were spurred by significant life events that started in adolescence and early adulthood; and fluctuating acceptability of their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities were noted throughout their lifetimes.

The salience of a Korean adoptees' adoptee, ethnic, and racial identity may shift due to life transitions or increased personal exploration (Lee, et al., 2010) and other prominent experiences (Castle, Knight, & Watters, 2011; Bergquist, 2003). Song and Lee (2009) noted their results reflected previous findings by Meier (1999) that early adulthood is a critical time when observing the salience of racial, ethnic; and adoptive identities (Grotevant, 2000). For instance, Lee, et al., (2010) reported that ethnic socialization experiences for adoptees during early adulthood and not as a youth were positively related to ethnic identity. However, in early adulthood, Korean adoptees noted certain circumstances that needed to be met in order to feel comfortable with exploring their multiple minority identities. Some contributing factors were: connectedness with adoptive family; ethnic socialization opportunities; level of acceptance of race with peers; and openness toward connecting with other Asians (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

For Korean adoptees, leaving the adoptive family's home was the catalyst for noticing their loss of racial ties and membership (Meier, 1999; Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Other examples of possible transitions that may occur during early adulthood included: attending college, developing long-term romantic relationships, or the initiation of a family (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). These transitions and experiences may be the catalysts for adoptees to question the importance of minority identities over time (Grotevant, 1997; Meier, 1999). For instance, there was a positive relationship between ethnic identity and

the level of processed trauma by the Korean adoptee from their adoptee narrative (Wilkinson, 1985, p. 33). Grotevant (1997) also posited that salience of adoptee identity is reflective of the adoptees' curiosity and willingness to examine their own personal history.

Salience of Identity due to Distress

Identity becomes increasingly salient for individuals who explicitly do not fit within normative categories (Root, 1998, p. 143). Moreover, the salience of identity may be dependent on the specific context and the influence of societal systems of oppression and power (Root, 1998, p. 144; Samuels, 2009). Moreover, these marginalizing experiences may impact Korean adoptees' cultural and social identities by causing dissonance with Korean adoptees' white cultural or racial identity (Walton, 2015). Cultural conflict is associated with interpersonal interactions that cause an individual to feel marginalized, rejected, or questioned in regards to one or more of their cultural or ethnic identities (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Lafromboise, et al., 1993). For instance, Korean adoptees could feel othered due to the racial features within a Caucasian environment (Meier, 1999; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005), but also feel othered within an ethnic or racial minority group due to being raised within a culturally white household (Kim, et al., 2010; Tan & Jordan-Arthur, 2012; Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005).

At an early age, Korean adoptees are identified and marginalized for their physical appearance and adoptee identity. During elementary school, Korean adoptees noted instances of being teased or bullied due to their adoptee, racial, ethnic, and cultural identities (Nam Soon & Reid, 2000). Korean adoptees may internalize and identify with

their adoptive parents' racial and social groups to minimize their own marginalized identities (Kim, et al., 2013). However, Korean adoptees may also experience expedited exploration of multiple minority identities due to confronting ethnic and racial differences within their adoptive family systems (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005), experiences of systemic discrimination, or the lack of connectedness with other minority peers (Friedlander, 2003).

During adolescence and adulthood, international transracial adoptees' experiences with minority stress may impact the salience of multiple minority identities. Mays and Cochran (2001) noted minority stress is perceived or actual instances of oppression that stem from systemic or individualized inequality; minority stress will be addressed comprehensively later in the paper. For Korean adoptees, instances of minority stress can provoke an assortment of reactions, such as inhibiting or highlighting the prominence of multiple minority identities (Kim, et al., 2010; Lee, 2003). Moreover, minority stress can interact with the context to influence the salience of one or multiple identities simultaneously (Tan & Nakkula, 2004, Weir, 2001). There is inherent variation and within-group difference among Korean adoptees regarding the salience of those identities (Kim, et al., 2010; Lee, 2003). This variation may be impacted by their past or current exploration of multiple minority identities, sole alignment with the identities of the dominant culture, or sense of belonging with their adoptive family (Meier, 1999; Ramsey & Mika, 2011; Docan-Morgan, 2010; Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Kim, et al., 2013; Sarubbi, et al., 2012). The level and degree of identity salience for Korean adoptees may change and fluctuate over the course of the lifespan (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Randolph & Holtzman, 2010).

Multiple Minority Research

For Korean adoptees, the development and interaction between multiple minority identities is a normative developmental experience (Lee, 2003). Multiple minority identities will be defined as possessing one or more minority identities, including, but not limited to race, ethnicity, adoptee identity, and cultural identity. There have been multiple models that attempt to explain and organize how these different identities may intersect or reciprocally impact self-identification. Korean adoptees have exhibited two general approaches to integrating multiple minority identities into their self-concept. One group focused their self-identification with relation to the culture and nationality of their adopted country versus their racial or ethnic identities (Westhues & Cohen, 1998; Cedarblad, Hook, Irhammer, & Mercke, 1999). The second group actively integrated their racial identity, ethnic identity, and their cultural heritage through personal engagement and exploration (Lee, Yoo, & Roberts, 2004, p. 220).

Research conducted by Baden and Wiley (2007) identified four clusters of adoption identity among international adoptees: unexamined, limited, unsettled, and integrated. Within their sample, they found that unsettled and integrated clusters both represented 31 percent of the participants; the limited group consisted of 21 percent and the unexamined cluster represented 17 percent. Baden and Wiley (2007) defined unexamined identity as the lack of adoption salience and individuals who spent little energy thinking about their adoption. Limited identity was described as an adoptee who demonstrated limited salience or concern with their adoptee identity, but were willing to discuss and explore the topic (Baden & Wiley, 2007). Unsettled identity was noted as moderate inclusion and salience of their adoptee identity and possessed greater levels of

thought related to adoption than the two previous adoption identities (Baden & Wiley, 2007). Lastly, integrated identity was defined as high levels of adoptee identity exploration and salience; and they perceived adoption as an important element of their sense of self (Baden & Wiley, 2007).

Beaupre, et al., (2015) reported six clusters noted when combining adoptive identity and ethnic identity levels among a sample of adolescent Korean adoptees. KAD-marginally committed individuals represented 20 percent of the sample; they are described as low scores on adoptive and ethnic identity (Beaupre, et al., 2015). Korean, 19 percent of the sample was noted as having high scores of ethnic identity and moderate scores for adoptee identity (Beaupre, et al., 2015). KAD-strongly committed, 20 percent of the sample was labeled with high scores on their adoptee identity and ethnic identity scores (Beaupre, et al., 2015). KAD-committed, 24 percent of the sample were characterized with moderate scores on ethnic and adoptee identity scores (Beaupre, et al., 2015). Adoptee, 11 percent were specified as moderate score on ethnic identity and high scores on adoptee identity (Beaupre, et al., 2015). KAD-uncommitted, 6 percent of the sample reflected very low scores for ethnic and adoptee identities (Beaupre, et al., 2015).

Korean adoptees may also encounter instances when their racial and ethnic identity salience is being reciprocally impacted. One example was noted for Korean adoptees who identified as White European American (WEA) versus Korean Americans (KA) (Suyemoto, 2002, p. 225). For the WEA group, there was a stronger salience for race versus ethnicity, while the KA group highlighted their ethnicity salience over race due to the heightened awareness of within-group differences among Asian Americans (Suyemoto, 2002, p. 230).

Baden and Steward (2000) reported that Korean adoptees' racial identity appeared to be related to their assumed racial group or the racial group of their adoptive parents. Racial self-identification also appears connected to a sense of membership and belonging to other racial groups or communities (Baden & Steward, 2000). The four different descriptors for Korean adoptee racial identity were: pro-self racial identity, pro-parent racial identity, racially undifferentiated, or biracial identity (Baden & Steward, 2000). The Korean adoptees' cultural identity reflected the same process, with identification occurring due to the cultural affiliations of their adoptive parents or their culture of origin. Baden & Steward (2000) reported four distinct cultural identities for Korean adoptees in the sample: culturally undifferentiated, pro-self cultural identity, pro-adoptive parent cultural identity, and bicultural identity. The dimensions of both race and culture created 16 categories within the cultural-racial identity configuration (Baden & Steward, 2000).

Kim, et al., (2010) developed another model that integrated the racial and cultural identities of Korean adoptees, while incorporating experiences with exclusion or a sense of belonging. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers noted a myriad of different affiliations for Korean adoptees' racial and cultural identities, such as: culturally excluded, racially excluded or a sense of belonging to the adoptee, Korean, Asian American, Korean American, or White communities. There were three relational identities noted for Korean adoptees within their sample. For instance, racially Asian/culturally American meant feeling racially excluded by Whites, racial belonging with Korean and Asian Americans, but culturally excluded by Korean Americans; the Korean American label described cultural exclusion by Korean Americans, along with

racial belonging with Koreans/Asians, but racial exclusion by Whites (Kim, et al., 2010). Lastly, Korean adoptees who identified as Asian American and as a member of a minority group experienced racial exclusion from Whites, a sense of racial belonging to Asian/Korean Americans, but culturally excluded by Korean Americans (Kim, et al., 2010).

Navigating Multiple Contexts

Those with bicultural identities appear adept at utilizing culturally-appropriate behavioral responses and flexibly navigating multiple cultural contexts (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). This concept, known as frame switching describes the process of alternating or shifting behaviors, values, or attitudes between multiple cultural expectancies and norms (Hong, et al., 2000). Also, bicultural people may integrate different values or attitudes that are reflective of their understanding and knowledge of each cultural situation and display an unwillingness to foreclose one or more cultural identities (Wei, et al., 2010). There are several different areas that are related to a person's multiple cultural spheres: socio-emotional (distress related to minority stress from the majority or cultural in-group), socio-cognitive (beliefs or attitudes toward their cultural identity dependant on context), and socio-cultural (cultural community involvement and regard for upholding cultural elements) (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005).

For Korean adoptees who possess multiple minority identities, the contextual and environmental factors may impact their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. Researchers reported that individuals in a group of Korean adoptees who possessed multiple minority identities demonstrated malleability with their racial identity (Kim, et al., 2010) and

ethnic identity among a group of internationally diverse adolescents due to changing contextual factors (Rosenthal & Hrynewich, 1985). Another example of this phenomenon was reported by one transracial adoptee who described adapting their racial identity based on the environment by identifying as multiracial and transitioning to multiple contexts within education, vocation, and relationships (Simon & Alstein, 1996). However, some Korean adoptees have demonstrated a lack of minority salience regardless of the context. Within a sample of Korean adoptees who identified as non-explorers, they reported race was not salient (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). This contributed to elevated comfort interacting with White people and led to avoiding relationships with Asian peers (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Identity Integration

Korean Adoptees may demonstrate a fluidity between the integration, confusion, or internal distancing among one or more of their cultural or social identities (Bergquist, 2003). Following a trip from South Korea, Walton (2015) reported that Korean adoptees made a concerted effort to self-identify as possessing multiple selves related to feeling Korean and integrating a Korean sense of self into their previously established self-image. Bergquist (2003) found Korean adoptees showed an ability to integrate their racial identity from their country of origin with the cultural composition of their adoptive family. Wickes and Slate (1997) also reported that most Korean adoptees within their sample identified as possessing an integrated American and Korean cultural identity versus only American or Korean. McGinnis, Smith, Ryan, and Howard (2009) noted that 78 percent of Korean international adoptees reported identifying as white in childhood and that over 50 percent of the total sample had transitioned to incorporating a different

racial or ethnic identity through socialization as an adult. The transition and incorporation of different social and cultural identities may be influenced by different levels of exposure, experience, and internal processing that occurs across the lifespan (Phinney, 1999; Baden, et al., 2012). However, Bergquist (2003) reported it was rare for Korean adoptees to become culturally Korean and solely adopt Korean values, norms, and congruent behaviors after facing the significant loss of their birth country at a young age and lack of exposure during childhood (Baden, et al., 2012). They noted that Korean adoptees predominantly identified as culturally American versus bicultural or as culturally Korean (Bergquist, 2003).

Research has noted that when Korean adoptees identify with a least one minority identity it has implications for other social and cultural identities. Langrehr, et al., (2015) noted Korean adoptees had higher rates of assimilating into the dominant racial and cultural group when there was a lack of processing, identification, and minimal meaning related to their Korean adoptee identity. Baden (2002) also reported that the Korean adoptees' identification with their Asian race and the culture of their birth country had a strong positive correlation (Baden, 2002). Korean adoptees who were able to identify culturally or ethnically as Asian American had an increased chance to also identify as a racial minority in the United States (Bergquist, 2003).

The integration of information and openness to their self-identification as adoptees has been related to increasing a secure sense of self and other positive outcomes (Grotevant, 1997; Grotevant, et al., 2000). Sarubbi, et al., (2012) noted that within a sample of Korean adoptees, positive attitudes and emotions toward their adoption positively predicted a higher purpose in life, personal growth levels, positive

interpersonal interactions with others, and self-acceptance. These results were significantly predicted above and beyond gender, age, and the adoption age for the Korean adoptees within the study (Sarubbi, et al., 2012).

Difficulties with Integrating Multiple Minority Identities

Adoptees may face specific challenges due to their adoption, race, ethnicity, or other demographic labels or features. For instance, some challenges for adoptees with integrating identity are: minority stress related to race and ethnicity, limited involvement or socialization with Korean culture, along with the loss of their birth country (McGinnis, et al., 2009). Korean adoptees may experience adversity when managing conflicting allegiances with their adoptive family, birth country, or other minority groups. Moreover, Korean adoptees contend with hardships related to assimilating into either their White or Korean cultural communities due to challenges regarding their in-group membership authenticity (Baden, et al., 2012).

International transracial adoptees have to reconcile the differences between their physical appearance and their cultural experiences within their adoptive family (Samuels, 2009; Trenka, 2011). Brooks and Barth (1999) noted that within a sample of transracial adoptees (Asian and African American) that 50 percent of the participants reported feeling uncomfortable with their physical makeup. Benson, Sharma, and Roehlkepartain (1994) noted within a sample of adolescent transracial adoptees that 20 percent reportedly wanted to be an alternative race, while three percent experienced embarrassment or humiliation related to their race. For international adoptee adolescents and young adults, higher levels of comfort with their racial background was noted when there was congruence between race and their physical features (Westhues & Cohen, 1998; Walton,

2015). In another sample of adolescent international adoptees, 83 percent of men and 71 percent of women were secure with their ethnic identity; while 74 percent of women and 76 percent of men were secure with their racial identity (Westhues & Cohen, 1998).

The transracial adoptee paradox described how adoptees' physical features delineated their minority membership in racial, cultural, or ethnic groups (Baden, et al., 2012; Walton, 2015; Lee, 2003); however, due to being socialized in primarily Caucasian families, those same individuals may identify with the dominant racial, cultural or ethnic groups aligned with their adoptive family (Lee, 2003; Bergquist, 2003; Baden, et al., 2012). Korean adoptees have to endure and process being a part of an adoptive family and a birth family simultaneously. Other barriers that increase the burden on the Korean adoptee are the lack of genealogical or genetic history from their birth family and the lack of physical or biological resemblance with their adoptive family. Despite these challenges, Baden (2008) noted that most international adoptees attempt to individuate from their culturally and racially white adoptive parents.

When attempting to negotiate multiple cultural communities, individuals face conflicting behaviors, values or feelings related to aligning with one or more cultural groups (Lee, 2003) through frame switching (Bergquist, 2003). Korean adoptees may face continuous challenges with developing an integrated cultural identity that acknowledges group membership with their adoptive parents, birth parents, and the Korean adoptee community. Bergquist (2003) reported an inverse relationship for Korean adoptees between their American and Korean cultural identities. Moreover, international adoptees may encounter difficulties forming their own racial, ethnic, or cultural identity when the white racial and cultural group was normalized as the reference

point by their adoptive family (Baden, et al., 2012). Korean adoptees actively negotiate differences in the cultural and social identities between the White and Korean communities (Phinney, 1990).

Intersectionality of Identity with International Adoptees

After careful review, there was a shortage of peer-reviewed articles dispelling the experiences of intersectionality for international adoptees. Zhao (2013) interviewed two transnationally adoptees in Norway. She observed two phenomenon that occurred with the participants. Zhao (2013) observed saturation, a term that occurs when one aspect of identity appears to minimize or reduce the appearance of one or more social categories for the adoptee. One example of saturation was when a participant in the study noted how their SES being raised in a wealthy White family was the primary factor through self-identification versus his race or being an adoptee (Zhao, 2013). Zhao (2013) also detailed interference, a process when the relevance of one or more identities creates dissonance for observers. For instance, Zhao (2013) reported how an international adoptee's fluency in a specific Norwegian accent influenced others' perception of her, despite being an Asian woman and adopted into a White family; it detracted from others' identification of other pertinent identities. These processes were not reported by Pearson (2010), a Korean adoptee, in her autoethnography. She noted how difficult it was for her to meet the expectations for being an Asian American woman and someone able to hear. She described "trying on different costumes" to find ways to be accepted and avoid punitive treatment by others.

This suggests that intersectionality among different social and cultural identities can co-occur based on contact with the specific setting. Not only do one or more identities interact with the environment at any given time, but the identities can also intersect and shift simultaneously.

Socialization

Brown and Ling (2012) defined socialization as the exchange and exposure of values, attitudes, behaviors, and belief systems through different environments and people. Sources of socialization may include multiple systems: family, school, or neighborhood (Ogbu, 1981). Bicultural socialization is the exposure and retaining of values, attitudes, and behaviors that occur within two or more cultural groups (Phinney, 1999). Through these socializing events, the individual further explores and separates their standing within the majority and minority groups located in the overall population (Tessler, Gamache, & Liu, 1999, p. 68). Racial socialization has been defined as the transmission of skills and techniques to address issues related to racial minority distress and the promotion of positive individual development (McHale et al., 2006). Cultural socialization is defined as the strategic attempt by adoptive parents to immerse their adoptive children through cultural and adoptee related events with the goal of obtaining membership within minority social and cultural groups (Lee, et al., 2006; Scroggs & Heitfield, 2001). Yoon (2004) described adoption socialization as the process for an adoptee to increase their sense of self and decrease discomfort with their adoption history and narratives. Ethnic socialization was reported as the development of ethnic pride and identity through the exploration of ethnic behaviors, beliefs, and norms (Song & Lee, 2009).

Despite firm labels of ethnic, adoptive, racial or cultural socialization, Korean adoptees may experience one or more simultaneously due to the nature of possessing multiple minority identities (because simultaneous socialization experiences for Korean adoptees can occur, if not specified I will refer to socialization experiences broadly for the rest of this paper). For instance, Song and Lee (2009) reported seven different types of cultural and ethnic socialization for Korean adoptees. Organized Korean events were noted as official gatherings related to Korean interests or activities (Song & Lee, 2009). Interpersonal Korean associations included the development of connections with other Koreans or Korean adoptees (Song & Lee, 2009). Diverse milieu referred to general experiences of contact through different temporary or permanent means-such as traveling or living within a community that possessed demographic variation (Song & Lee, 2009). Support was defined as the adoptee perceiving emotional assistance when seeking out experiences with multicultural people (Song & Lee, 2009). Birth roots described adoptees seeking contact with their birth country through birth searches or visits. Lastly, cultural encounters included socialization within culturally-specific activities that matched the adoptee's ethnic, racial, or cultural background (Song & Lee, 2009).

Baden, et al., (2012) developed a model of reculturation that occurs for international adoptees through a series of different events and transitions across the lifespan. These different phases account for the cultural immersion starting in the adoptees' birth country and the transition to their socialization as adoptees in their adoptive country. There are six phases within the reculturation process that occurs for the international adoptee starting at birth: enculturation; relinquishment and temporary care; adoption: enculturation stops and assimilation begins; immigration; assimilation

continues; and reculturation (Baden, et al., 2012). The stage of reculturation described the international adoptees' relational development with their birth country or other minority communities beginning as an adult (Baden, et al., 2012). Moreover, this process is undertaken by the international adoptee and is not led by the adoptive family (Baden, et al., 2012). Five different outcomes of reculturation were identified: adoptee culture, reclaimed culture, bicultural, assimilated culture, and combined culture (Baden, et al., 2012).

One important aspect that occurs and re-occurs within international adoptee populations are the life transitions that spur exploration of self and identity. These different events may motivate the adoptee to answer "Who am I" (Darnell, et al., 2017)? Song and Lee (2009) reported that Korean adoptees developing interpersonal connections with Korean communities was the most common socialization experience and it occurred with highest frequency during the early adulthood and adulthood ages. The second most common socialization occurred within organized Korean events, this was particularly relevant for young children and adults (Song & Lee, 2009). The third most popular socializing category was pursuing information related to birth family, that took place during adulthood (Song & Lee, 2009). These exploratory events may alter values, beliefs and attitudes of adoptees. Moreover, the Korean adoptees' task to reconnect and develop ties to their country of origin was deemed an appropriate and normative task for identity exploration and development (Song & Lee, 2009).

Socialization in Childhood

Beginning when the Korean adoptee is born, the first phase of reculturation has started (Baden, et al., 2012) through enculturation. These newborn and toddler Korean adoptees enculturate to their birth country through social and cultural information that is being disseminated by their birth family, foster family, or other Native South Koreans (Baden, et al., 2012). Moreover, this may occur in a variety of settings including foster homes, orphanages, or adoption agencies (Baden, et al., 2012). Enculturation continues for these Korean child adoptees until their adoption is completed and they are placed with their new adoptive family outside of South Korea (Baden, et al., 2012).

The second phase is called relinquishment and temporary care (Baden, et al., 2012). During this stage, Korean child adoptees may be placed in secondary settings following the relinquishment by birth parents or birth families. Enculturation continues due to the Korean child adoptee being continuously exposed to cultural and social information within their birth country (Baden, et al., 2012). Following the second phase, Korean child adoptees experience the third phase, adoption: enculturation stops and assimilation begins (Baden, et al., 2012). Following the completion of the adoption process, enculturation ends with the Korean adoptees' birth culture and assimilation begins with the culture of their adoptive family (Baden, et al., 2012).

Assimilation starts for Korean child adoptees once the adoption has been formalized and they are removed from their birth country and culture (Baden, et al., 2012). Due to being raised within primarily white adoptive families, Korean child adoptees assimilate into the culture of their adoptive family members and socialized peers (Lee, 2003; Wickes & Slate, 1997; Baden, et al., 2012). Youth adoptees immediately

adapt into the culture of their adoptive parents to: develop the new parent-child relationship, acquire cultural information for communication purposes, and the absence of birth culture information (Baden, et al., 2012; Lee, 2003). Children socialized within the dominant culture may identify themselves similarly based on the race, ethnicity, or culture of other peers and family members (Phinney, 1989).

In addition to the initiation and continuance of their assimilation process, the immigration phase within the model of reculturation occurs when the Korean adoptee is placed with their new adoptive family (Baden, et al., 2012). Depending on the age of the Korean adoptee when they emigrate from South Korea, they may have been granted citizenship through the Child Citizenship Act of 2000, become naturalized citizens through their adoptive family, or not been granted citizenship (Baden, et al., 2012). The Korean child adoptee undergoes the isolating experience of immigrating to a new country (Baden, et al., 2012). The young person is exposed to novel cultural and social differences within their new adoptive family and their adoptive country. These Korean adoptees may also encounter the historical or socio-cultural norms and legacies of stereotypes, prejudice, or discrimination due to multiple minority identities (Baden, et al., 2012).

Langrehr, et al., (2015) reported four different labels that detailed the type of socialization Korean adopted youth experienced growing up. One category described a Korean child adoptee who did not receive exposure to Asian or Korean people within their neighborhoods, education, or through the news (Langrehr, et al., 2015). The next group of Korean child adoptees received some opportunities to become acquainted with Korean culture through activities facilitated by their adoptive parents (Langrehr, et al.,

2015). The third group of Korean adoptees noted culturally socializing experiences due to their personal motivation and desire (Langrehr, et al., 2015; Quiroz, 2012; Tessler, et al., 1999, p. 68), called ‘child choice’ (Lee, 2003). Lastly, the fourth group noted disinterest with Korean cultural events and sought out Korean adoptee gatherings to develop interpersonal relationships with other adopted youth (Langrehr, et al., 2015). Researchers believed cultural socialization beginning in childhood was associated with forming adaptive relationships, solidifying self-identification, and minority identity development (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Langrehr & Naprier, 2014).

Socialization occurring within the adoptive family during childhood. The fifth phase of reculturation continues through assimilation, with most transracial Korean child adoptees being primarily exposed and socialized within White American cultural contexts (Bergquist, 2003) and face few barriers to achieving American cultural competence (Friedlander et al., 2000). Adoptive parents can control the Korean child adoptees’ time devoted to social identity exploration, adoption history information, and the frequency of culturally relevant activities (Rosnati, et al., 2015; Mohanty, et al., 2007). Moreover, the adoptive parents influence dialogue related to minority identity experiences and validating the difficulties of loss and grief for the adoptee (Mohanty, et al., 2007; Rosnati, et al., 2015). Research has shown mixed results for international adoptees and the level of socialization they experienced from their adoptive parents. Lee, et al., (2006) noted that a majority of adoptive parents involved their child in a culturally-relevant event three times in the past year, conversed with their child regarding issues of marginalization at school, and spoke with their children’s teachers regarding their child’s adoption. One Korean adoptee interviewee noted how his father participated with him

when he was actively involved with learning tae kwon do, a Korean martial art (Lee, 2016). The participant noted his parents took a ‘passive’ role, but were reliable with attending to his needs and providing emotional support (Lee, 2016). Lee (2016) also noted that six out of nine Korean adoptee participants reported their adoptive parents were active and supportive regarding their cultural socialization in childhood.

Adoptive parents may neglect to: address issues of marginalization, create a supportive space for identity meaning making, and incorporate multicultural considerations when interacting with their adoptive children (Lee, 2016; Thomas & Tessler, 2007). To contradict previous research, other studies have shown only the minority of adoptive parents engaged their international adoptive children with cultural, racial or ethnic socialization; or attempted to integrate ethnic or racial considerations within their adoptive children’s identity (Galvin, 2003; Tessler, et al., 1999, p. 77). Child adoptees may experience their adoptive parents curtailing ethnic, racial, or cultural socialization by withholding education about the adoptees’ country of origin’s culture (Thomas & Tessler, 2007). One example was found within a sample of international child adoptees, 79 percent responded that their adoptive families failed to include culturally-relevant holidays within family events (Mohanty, et al., 2007). 21 out of 25 multiracial adoptee participants reported a lack of reliable time within their adoptive family devoted to racial socialization during their childhood (Samuels, 2009); and it was rare for their adoptive parents to connect and empathize with their experiences when navigating racial issues (Samuels, 2009).

The level of support and consistent attention to the adoptees' minority identities by adoptive parents has been associated with the adoptive parent's comfort and knowledge with examining those issues (McGolderick, 1982, p. 6; Friedlander et al., 2000).

The level of ethnic socialization by adoptive parents can impact the salience of ethnic and adoptee identities for Korean adult adoptees. Langrehr and Naprier (2014) noted that Korean adoptees who received information and experiences with their birth culture as children noted significantly higher identification with being ethnically Korean versus non-Korean; this has also been replicated in other samples of Korean adoptees (Lee & Quintana, 2005; Yoon, 2000; Nam Soon & Reid, 2000). Korean adoptees who did not identify as ethnically Korean in childhood reported depressed levels of racial exposure with other Asian Americans by their adoptive parents (Langrehr & Naprier, 2014). Beaupre, et al. (2015) noted ethnic socialization by adoptive parents for Korean adolescent adoptees impacted different identity clusters. KAD-marginally committed demonstrated less ethnic socialization by their parents than KAD-strongly committed and Korean clusters (Beaupre, et al., 2015). Moreover, Korean adoptees categorized with the Korean label had more ethnic socialization engagement by their adoptive parents when compared to the KAD-uncommitted group (Beaupre, et al., 2015). Also, participants within the KAD-strongly committed group had significantly more experiences with ethnic socialization as children than the KAD-committed, Adoptee, and KAD-uncommitted groups (Beaupre, et al., 2015).

Nam Soon and Reid (2000) reported that starting at age 9; the Korean adoptee children identified themselves as Korean American, Korean, or American. The Korean American group identified youth adoptees who experienced curiosity and support related to learning more about their Korean culture; the immersive experiences included: learning the language, attending culturally-related events, or learning Korean martial arts (Nam Soon & Reid, 2000). However, the Korean child adoptees who identified as Korean or American reported confusion with their ethnic identity and received less exposure to Korean heritage or cultural experiences (Nam Soon & Reid, 2000). In the study, the children were able to integrate their Korean and American cultural identities after receiving increased exposure to Korea, received cultural socialization, and retained agency related to their social identities (Nam Soon & Reid, 2000). This offers exemplary examples of how malleable the identity for Korean adopted children are due to different socialization experiences (Baden, et al., 2012).

Socialization occurring outside of the adoptive family during childhood.

Korean child adoptees may also receive socialization experiences from outside of their adoptive familial system. Interactions with diverse communities enable Korean child adoptees to become increasingly exposed to diversity and minority communities (Langrehr & Naprier, 2014). Exposure to these culturally, racially, or ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods increased the opportunities for Korean child adoptees to seek out cultural, racial, or ethnic socialization (Song & Lee, 2009; Baden, et al., 2012). Examples may include: consuming culturally-relevant foods, listening to cultural or ethnic music, and exploring socialization information through school assignments (Song & Lee, 2009; Baden, et al., 2012).

Moreover, Korean child and adolescent adoptees may also attend clubs and community groups that are relevant for racial, cultural, ethnic, or adoptive reasons (Tse, 1999; Baden, et al., 2012).

Within a sample of Korean adoptees, when asked if they grew up in a majority White community as children; between 82 and 86 percent noted yes despite identifying as not culturally Korean and culturally Korean respectively (Langrehr & Naprier, 2014). These results were similar within a sample of international adoptees where 81 percent of the participants reported not living in a multicultural or multiracial community (Mohanty, et al., 2007). Research has been conducted that growing up in diverse communities can impact self-identification of Korean adoptees. Within a sample of Korean adult adoptees, the authors noted level of exposure as children to multicultural or Korean-dominated communities were related to identifying as culturally Korean American (Kim, et al., 2010). However, transracial adoptees raised by adoptive parents in predominantly White American communities faced confusion about race and ethnicity along with depressed levels of ethnic identity (Friedlander et al., 2000; Lee, 2003).

Another source of ethnic and cultural socialization appears to be the development of relationships with other minority individuals. Korean child and adolescent adoptees may seek out community members, caregivers, and friends who share similar physical or cultural backgrounds (McGinnis, et al., 2009). Thomas and Tessler (2007) found that higher percentages of Asian populations in local communities provided opportunities for adoptive parents and their Chinese adopted children to form personal connections and learn more about Chinese culture and language (Thomas & Tessler, 2007).

Moreover in a sample of Korean adoptees, they reported the number of racial minority and culturally Korean relationships were dependent on their level of exposure with culturally diverse communities as children (Langrehr & Naprier, 2014).

Korean cultural camps have been developed to expose Korean child adoptees to South Korean customs and history, along with the potential development of forming personal relationships with other adoptees and culturally Korean people (Bergquist, 2003; Baden, 2015; Randolph & Holtzman, 2010). Korean child adoptees can attend Korean-specific classes related to language, food, and creative forms of art and dance (McGinnis, et al., 2009; Ramsey & Mika, 2011). Baden, et al., (2012) also noted child and adolescent adoptees may further explore their adoptee identity and learn about adoption-related resources (Randolph & Holtzman, 2010). Research conducted with samples of Korean adult adoptees has shown mixed empirical support for the Korean culture camps.

For instance, Korean culture camps helped to develop an adoptee community and exposure to their birth culture (Lee, 2016), but did little to support connections with Korean Americans (Ramsey & Mika, 2011). Lee (2016) reported out of nine participants, six reported culture camps served as an important resource for learning information about their cultural background and adoptee identity.

In addition to topics related to Korean culture, culture camps are marketed to offer an open platform to discuss issues of race, ethnicity, and culture (Baden, 2015). These may include discussions related to instances of minority stress, such as racism, discrimination, or other forms of marginalization (Baden, 2015). After completing interviews with Korean adoptees, Ramsey and Mika (2011) noted the cultural camps did little to provide skills or support related to minority stress; or ethnic identity exploration

(Randolph & Holtzman, 2010). Korean adult adoptees also reported that the cultural camps lacked helpful or substantive information when discussing issues of race within the adoptive family (Randolph & Holtzman, 2010).

Socialization in Adulthood

During late adolescence and early adulthood, Korean adoptees end the period of assimilation with their adoptive parents and enter the phase of reculturation (Baden, et al., 2012). This is the last phase within the model of reculturation proposed by Baden, et al., (2012) and is initiated by the Korean adoptee independent of their adoptive family's wishes or motivations. During this age, Korean adoptees assess their new freedom and efficacy when choosing their level of cultural, racial, and ethnic socialization (Song & Lee, 2009). Reculturation reflects the Korean adoptees' motivation to seek out new contact and reestablish their connectedness to either the culture of their birth country or to racially, ethnically, and culturally congruent groups in their adoptive country (Baden, et al., 2012). This lifetime process may include fluctuating levels of interest, engagement, or commitment toward the adoptees' birth culture, cultural-specific events, and development of social relationships with minority communities (Zimmerman, et al., 1996). These shifting levels of commitment may be due to changes in the Korean adoptees' salient identities, different environmental contexts, or proactively prioritizing the culture of their adoptive country or birth country (Baden, et al., 2012).

Reculturation occurs through three different mechanisms: education, experience, and immersion (Baden, et al., 2012). Education for reculturation occurs when the Korean adoptee learns and obtains knowledge related to their birth country and culture. The individual understands and comprehends information within language, fine arts, history,

and culturally-specific practices and norms (Baden, et al., 2012). These experiences form the foundation for an adoptees' connection with their birth country or shared social and cultural groups (Baden, et al., 2012).

Experience typically follows some degree of exposure to education and offers adoptees an opportunity to integrate their knowledge through social interactions with their racial, ethnic, or cultural groups (Baden, et al., 2012). These may include trips back to their birth country or the establishment of cultural and social group memberships congruent with their birth country within the United States (Baden, et al., 2012). Immersion can occur for Korean adoptees by living extended periods of time in their birth country or by moving into communities and neighborhoods that reflect their multiple minority identities (Baden, et al., 2012). These immersive experiences are intended to increase their language skills, comfort with racial, ethnic, or cultural groups, and relationship building with members of those communities (Baden, et al., 2012). During this process, Korean adoptees modify their primary racial, ethnic, and cultural group and may develop some displacement from their adoptive family and the dominant social or cultural group (Baden, et al., 2012).

Socialization in college and other education settings. One setting that offers increased flexibility and expanded choices of reculturation occurs in college or other educational settings. In college, Korean adoptees may have opportunities to explore their cultural, racial, adoptee, and ethnic backgrounds through socialization activities and groups (Meier, 1999).

For instance, Lee Shiao & Tuan (2008) noted within-group differences for Korean adoptees who identified as modest and substantial ethnic explorers in college. These differences were observed based on their level of willingness to pursue relationships or group memberships with other Asian students (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Those who were labeled as modest explorers attended one Asian studies class, wrote papers related to Korean adoption for assignments, and attended student based multicultural groups (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). In contrast, substantial ethnic explorers participated in multiple Asian studies' classes, developed majority Asian social networks, and were active members with primarily Asian student groups or associations. Following interviews with Korean adult adoptees, Lee Shiao and Tuan (2008) reported exposure to college education was an important factor for ethnic and cultural exploration; investigating their multiple minority identities and increasing awareness of their sense of self. Moreover for Korean adoptees who did not attend college, they showed less interest in seeking out information about their ethnic, racial, or cultural backgrounds (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Another setting that offered Korean adoptees the prospect of learning information about other cultural and social groups was attending language classes (Meier, 1999). Through these meetings, Korean adoptees could increase their capabilities to converse and socialize with other ethnic, racial, or cultural groups. One adoptee noted greater connection with other Korean Americans and the South Korean culture due to attending Korean language classes (Ramsey & Mika, 2011). Language classes offered the value of learning new linguistic skills, increasing cultural knowledge, and examples of White minority classes.

Some Korean adoptees shared that the White minority classes represented the first time when Whites did not represent the racial, ethnic, or cultural majority (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Socialization with Asian populations. As adults, Korean adoptees may enjoy increased freedom to explore and interact with other racial, ethnic, or cultural groups. One group that Korean adult adoptees have sought contact with are other Asian Americans (Langrehr, et al., 2015). Lee Shiao and Tuan (2008) reported variability for Korean adoptees forming relationships with other Asian Americans. Modest explorers tentatively attended groups specified for Asian Americans and developed some informal relationships through those encounters, but were not confident when confronted with unfamiliar customs and rules (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Modest explorers preferred developing connections with Asian children, who provided a safe and secure space to procure information regarding their multiple minority identities and backgrounds (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). However, substantial explorers connected and engaged with groups of Asian Americans consistently and with higher levels of confidence (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Moreover, this group of Korean adoptees was determined to obtain vocations within Asian organizations and develop connections with other Asian co-workers (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Korean adoptees have reported varied responses when interacting with other Asian Americans. For instance, one Korean adoptee noted that interacting with Koreans in the United States resulted in cultural clashes due to differences with norms, values, and beliefs (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Due to these potential struggles, international adoptees may choose to align their sense of community with adoptees or their adoptive

family's social and cultural groups (Grotevant, et al., 2000). However for a sample of Korean adoptees, the development of personal connections with non-adopted Koreans contributed to their inclusion of a Korean cultural and ethnic identity (Langrehr, et al., 2015). They utilized those relationships to discuss similarities and differences in cultural education or advance other immersive experiences (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Socialization with other Korean adoptees. For Korean adult adoptees, interacting with the Korean adult adoptee community offers a unique and special kinship to share experiences and narratives. This need for social connectedness was the primary catalyst for developing social networks, organizing events, and creating communities for adoptees (Ramsey & Mika, 2011; Baden, et al., 2012). Korean adoptees have also founded international agencies and organizations that offer assets and assistance to other international and transracial adoptees around the world (Hübinette, 2004; Lee & Miller, 2009, p. 344). Some resources include: adoptee-run groups, post-adoption contact, and hosting adoption-specific conventions or gatherings (Baden, et al., 2012).

Langrehr, et al., (2015) noted that Korean adoptees sought out relationships with other Korean adoptees when exploring information about Korean culture; or following their visit to South Korea (Bergquist, 2003). The shared experiences with adoption, culture, ethnicity, and race motivated Korean adoptees to develop personal bonds with Korean adoptee peers (Kim, et al., 2010). These connections within the Korean adoptee community established secure and reliable sources of support. Moreover, Korean adoptees have reportedly felt accepted based on collective experiences, group membership, and linked identities (Becker, Butler, & Nachtigall, 2005).

These special adoptee enclaves may mitigate minority distress (Prebin, 2008) by offering a refuge for Korean adoptees not identifying with the culture of their adoptive parents or their Korean heritage (Jo, 2006, p. 289).

Socialization with adoptive family during adulthood. Korean adoptees may continue to have a relationship with their adoptive family throughout adulthood. The relationship with these family members may represent a risk or protective factor for reculturation and socialization with their birth country, birth culture, or with other minority groups. There were three categories noted by Korean adoptees when describing the type of relationship they possessed with their adoptive families during adulthood: firm and reliably close relationship; ongoing progress with developing an intimate relationship; absent or removed from relationship (Langrehr, et al., 2015). For instance, one Korean adoptee participant noted that both his adoptive parents were involved with seeking information related to his birth family search and offered financial support to explore additional possibilities in South Korea (Lee, 2016). A different participant interviewed by Lee (2016) noted that his ethnic identity was associated with the quality of support from his adoptive family. One Korean adoptee participant noted the lack of relationships with Asian Americans stemmed from his encounters with marginalization and the lack of follow-up support from his adoptive mother (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Ramsey and Mika (2011) noted that a Korean adult adoptee reported an overall lack of openness with her parents regarding their adoption narrative or the impact of her Korean heritage. These different examples offered divergent accounts regarding the level of support and helpfulness adoptive families may offer during reculturation for their Korean adoptive children during adulthood.

Socialization experiences in South Korea. Along a continuum, Korean adoptees may be motivated to maintain a connection to both their birth country and adoptive country (Wei, et al., 2010). Freundlich and Liberthal (2000) reported that 57 percent of the 163 participants within their sample had visited South Korea at least once during their lifetime. Korean adoptees may seek out opportunities to reculturate with elements of their birth country to acquire information, participate in immersive activities, and develop meaningful relationships (Bergquist, 2003). These homeland visits enable Korean adoptees to express their lost connection with South Korea and confront feelings of worry, sadness, or even rage from their adoption history (Meier, 1999). Through socialization and reculturative experiences in South Korea, Korean adoptees are empowered to interact directly with members of their racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage and have a unique opportunity to socialize with the South Korean way of life (Baden & Steward, 2000). These immersive experiences in South Korea have been linked to the increased salience of the Korean adoptees' adoptee and racial identity in their birth country.

Socialization experiences through organized tours in South Korea. Attending homeland or agency tours in South Korea enables Korean adoptees unique opportunities to be exposed and interact with the South Korean culture. These reculturation activities introduce Korean adoptees to their cultural heritage, experience cultural-specific events, and immerse themselves with other Korean adoptee peers and South Korean people. Freundlich and Liberthal (2000) reported that 45 percent of the 163 participants within their sample had visited South Korea through an adoption-agency homeland tour. Outside of economic reasons, the tours were developed to decrease the linguistic and

cultural barriers for Korean adoptees and their families when returning to their birth country (Bergquist, 2003). These excursions may include: tours of cities, visiting adoption agencies, or attending South Korean cultural classes (Bergquist, 2003). Also, the organizers can designate time to spend with native South Koreans: South Korean un-wed mothers, play with South Korean orphans, and meet with social workers to conduct adoption file reviews or birth family searches (Prebin, 2008).

Pursuing socialization experiences with birth family in South Korea. The initiation of a birth family search typically begins in the adopted country of the Korean adoptee (Kim, 2013). The continued pursuit of developing relational connections with birth family members can continue in South Korea. Seeking contact with birth family may unlock information related to family lineage or obtaining an adoptees' medical history (Kim, 2013; March, 1995; Sachdev, 1992). Also, Korean adult adoptees may feel compelled to seek out biological family due to exploring their Korean adoptee identity, coping with significant life events, or processing the ongoing relationship with their adoptive family (March, 1995; Sachdev, 1992).

Despite the legitimate reasons for conducting a birth family search, Korean adoptees face extreme challenges for developing connections with birth family members (Kim, 2013). Kim (2013) reported among a group of 76, 646 Korean adult adoptees that only 2.7 percent had successfully located their birth family. Problems with successful meetings are tied to the absence of social and emotional support from adoptive family members or the lack of personal resources by the Korean adoptee (Kim, 2013).

Inhibiting factors for completing birth searches include: relational problems with adoptive family members, fears of failure or rejection through the process of searching, lack of financial or supportive resources, and denying the connection to their birth country (Langrehr, et al., 2015).

Problems with successful birth searches for Korean adoptees have also stemmed from the lack of support from the South Korean government and South Korean adoption agencies. For instance, adoption records and files may contain incorrect or incomplete information (Walton, 2012). Cultural and governmental rules vehemently protect the privacy of birth family members, which restricts access to birth family identifying information (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Walton, 2012). Coupled with a lack of trustworthy support and assistance from adoption agencies, Korean adoptees are often isolated or neglected when pursuing a birth search (Ma, 2017). During this arduous endeavor, Korean adoptees are receiving socialization and reculturation experiences from the birth search process and becoming acquainted with the South Korean cultural norms related to adoption and birth parents (Langrehr, et al., 2015).

Experiences with visiting South Korea. Past research has noted that Korean adoptees who return to South Korea can provoke an opulent array of responses. From a sample of Korean adult adoptees, 44 percent reported positive experiences, while 22 percent reported a negative response following their expedition to South Korea (Freundlich & Liberthal, 2000). Meier (1999) noted Korean adoptee participants experienced feeling happy and relieved because of blending in with other Korean adoptees or native South Korean people (Bergquist, 2003; Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Also, these reculturative experiences enabled Korean adoptees to increase their

knowledge and awareness of South Korean culture, language barriers, and increase the level of connectedness with their birth country (Bergquist, 2003). However, other Korean adoptees reportedly felt uncomfortable and misplaced within South Korea due to different societal norms, lack of geographical familiarity, and minority distress from deficiencies in cultural or linguistic knowledge (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Langrehr, et al., 2015; Prebin, 2008; Ebrahim, 1992; Ramsey & Mika, 2011). Through interactions with native South Koreans, Korean adoptees reportedly experienced low confidence with their Korean cultural identity (Walton, 2015).

Impacts of the birth visits. There are mixed results for Korean adoptees who return from their immersive experience in South Korea. For instance, Korean adoptees did not show a significant change in their ethnic identity when measured prior to and after their return trip to Korea (Bergquist, 2003). Also, most Korean adoptees following their trip to Korea noted few changes in behavioral inclusion of Korean culture or heritage (Bergquist, 2003). However, Yoon (2000) reported that socialization within their birth country was positively related to well-being for a sample of Korean adoptees. Several studies noted that Korean adoptees experienced higher levels of confidence with their ethnic identity when they interacted with native South Korean people who shared ethnic, cultural, or racial backgrounds than those who refused to seek out those encounters (Basow, et al., 2008; Nam Soon & Reid, 2000).

During visits to South Korea, Korean adoptees observe the cultural, racial, and ethnic landscape of the South Korean people. These immersive experiences encourage introspection regarding their multiple minority identities and their relationship with South Korea (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). From interviews, Korean adoptees noted that returns

to Korea initiated thoughts regarding how their hypothetical life may have looked if they had not been adopted (Walton, 2015). These experiences back to South Korea may assist Korean adoptees when attempting to reconcile their adoptee narratives and integrate new knowledge regarding their birth country (Baden, et al., 2012). In terms of reculturation, these trips offer opportunities to assimilate linguistic information, interact with native South Koreans, and process another cultural and social way of life (Baden, et al., 2012).

Korean Adoptees who Lacked Socialization

Research has shown that some Korean adoptees have experienced little or no ethnic, racial, or cultural socialization. Korean adult adoptee participants choosing to abstain from exploring their minority identities was related to the absence of cultural or ethnic socializing opportunities, their inability to attend ethnic or cultural events, or lacking personal investment (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Lee Shiao and Tuan (2008) reported that ethnic exploration dramatically decreased for Korean adoptees when they lacked interactions with Asian community members or failed to seek out higher education in early adulthood. The absence of socialization experiences for Korean adoptees can impact the salience and development of multiple minority identities (Kim, et al., 2010). Moreover, disengagement from non-majority communities appeared to also impact Korean adult adoptees' self-identification and confidence developing relationships with other racial and ethnic minorities. One Korean adoptee participant noted that she experienced anxiety when connecting with others who did not identify as White and believed her connection with Whites was "more appropriate" (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

This group of Korean adoptees may represent individuals who continued to assimilate into the dominant culture and foreclosed their engagement with the culture of their birth country (Baden, et al., 2012).

Changing Levels of Socialization for Adoptees

Korean adoptees exhibited variation with their level of socialization and its impact on the adoptive narrative and multiple minority identities. Over the course of a lifetime, members of this community may arrogate behaviors that signify different levels of involvement and reculturation with cultural, adoptee, racial, or ethnic communities (Baden, et al., 2012). For instance, Korean adoptees may exhibit cultural shedding; decreased levels of involvement or cultural learning; and increased levels of involvement that are related to salience of their personal identities (Berry, 1992).

Baden, et al., (2012) discovered five different cultural identities based on experiences with reculturation and socialization events: adoptee culture, assimilated culture, reclaimed culture, combined culture, and bicultural. These categories offer clearly delineated dimensions that reflected the impact between identity development and the environmental context (Baden, et al., 2012). A person who identified within the adoptee culture category may sacrifice ties to the norms, values, and attitudes of their birth and adoptive cultures (Baden, et al., 2012). These adoptees prefer membership and identification within the adoptee cultural enclave and are actively involved within those organizations and structured activities (Baden, et al., 2012).

An adoptee who identified with an assimilated culture label were those who prioritized their identity within the culture of their adoptive parents (Baden, et al., 2012). These individuals superficially explored their birth culture, retained their White cultural identity, and minimized other minority statuses (Baden, et al., 2012).

Those within the reclaimed culture group were adoptees who experienced full immersion into the culture of their birth country, while shedding the cultural affiliation of their adoptive parents and the adoptee community (Baden, et al., 2012). Moreover, they acquired the requisite language, cultural, and ethnic skills to be acknowledged by natives as a member of their in-group (Baden, et al., 2012). Adoptees who are members of the combined cultural label are described as integrating multiple minority identities based on affiliation with the culture of their birth country, adoptive country, and/or adoptee community. Moreover, they maintain a high level of connectedness with multiple communities through a committed sense of belonging and continuously elevated level of commitment (Baden, et al., 2012). Baden, et al., (2012) reported that adoptees within the bicultural label were defined as those who achieved a sense of belonging and knowledge with the culture of their adoptive family and the Americanized version of their birth country. The adoptee actively chose to minimize the connection with their birth country and has multiple cultural identities (Baden, et al., 2012).

Impact of Socialization

Exposure to an assortment of socialization experiences has been linked with minority identity levels and other measures of mental health across the lifespan. DeBerry and Scarr (1996) noted within a sample of African American child adoptees that ethnic and racial socialization were positively associated with ethnic and racial identity.

Moreover, levels of ethnic socialization were positively related to ethnic pride, and ethnic membership among a different sample of African American youth adoptees (Smith, McRoy, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2008). Song and Lee (2009) also reported a positive association for Korean adult adoptees between levels of ethnic socialization and ethnic identity level. Increased acceptance of transracial child and adult adoptees' racial and ethnic identities were linked to increased levels of bicultural socialization (Lafromboise, et al., 1993; Westhues & Cohen, 1998).

Research conducted with Korean child adoptees found a positive relationship between levels of cultural socialization with multiple minority identity development and overall well-being (Lee & Quintana, 2005; Lee, et al., 2006). Moreover, ethnic and racial socialization had a positive association with adoption adjustment and self-esteem among African American youth adoptees (DeBerry & Scarr, 1996; Smith, et al., 2008). Bicultural socialization was also related to increased self-esteem and positive adoption adjustment among samples of child and adult transracial adoptees (Lafromboise, et al., 1993; Westhues & Cohen, 1998). In a study conducted by Sarubbi and colleagues (2012), they noted cultural socialization levels predicted levels of personal growth, adaptive interpersonal relationships with others, and self-acceptance while accounting for gender, age, and age of adoption placement for a sample of Korean adult adoptees.

Minority Stress

Minority stress has been identified as perceived or actual experiences of marginalization that impact an individuals' behavioral health and sense of fulfillment (Mays & Cochran, 2001). This phenomenon occurs when the individual's actions are constricted and in contrast to the dominant or normative culture (Dion, 2002). The

othering of minority populations leads to increased feelings of threat and vulnerability to physical and psychological distress (Dion, 2002). If a person is unable to adapt to the dominant culture, they may be at higher risk to experience acculturative stress or even psychopathology (Berry, 1997). Cheung-Blunden and Juang (2008) noted that acculturative stress disorder can occur when a person seeks to assimilate and fit the norms, values, or belief systems of a dominant or normative cultural group. This may transpire from perceived situational or generalized distress (Wei, et al., 2010). Minority distress can occur over the lifetime for minority populations based on the impact of daily stressors and individuals' personalized reactions (Chen & Tryon, 2012).

Minority populations may experience a multitude of marginalizing or minority stress encounters. One example is ethnic discrimination, it was defined as prejudiced behavior used by the majority group to isolate or reject members from a minority ethnic community (Williams, et al., 2003). Another exemplar is racism, it occurs within a societal system that increases or sustains inequities solely based on the physical appearance of the individual (Walton, et al., 2013). Instances of racial and ethnic discrimination describe the unequal and unjust treatment of individuals solely based on self-identified or prescribed ethnic and racial identities (Gee, Ryan, Laflamme, & Holt, 2006). Goffman (1963) also utilized the term social discrimination to describe instances when people are invalidated for identities and traits that are generally uncommon. Additional sources of minority stress for Korean adoptees may stem from stereotypes, aggressions, or bullying that encourages isolating or exclusionary behavior due to visible and invisible identities (Cedarblad, et al., 1999).

One response that has been observed by researchers following experiences of marginalization is resilience. Resilience may offer resources that buffer the direct relationship between experiences of minority stress and pathology (Meyer, 2003). In addition, these stressors may mandate the person to adopt new practices to navigate the current context or situation (Meyer, 2003). Exposure to minority stress has been linked to bicultural identity development (Crocker, 1999) and contributes to integrating an individual's sense of self (Berry, 1990). Also, Phinney (1990) noted that a person's attitude toward their ethnic identity may be a protective psychological factor when faced with experiences of feeling attacked or marginalized as a member of a minority group.

Percentages of Marginalization for International Adoptees

There have been multiple studies conducted with international adoptees that described the percentages of encountering minority stress throughout their lifetimes. Within a sample of international adoptees, 74 percent of women and 69 percent of men noted receiving racial or ethnic slurs during elementary school by other classmates (Westhues & Cohen, 1998). Within the same sample, Westhues and Cohen (1998) stated that 22 percent of men and 19 percent of women cited explicit examples of discrimination, such as: not being included in games or activities by peers, labeled with ethnic, racial, or cultural stereotypes, and bullied due to their race or ethnicity. For the international adoptees in the sample, Westhues & Cohen (1998) also noted that 85 percent of men and 82 percent of women had reported incidents 'when people were nasty or unpleasant about their racial or ethnic background.' Cedarblad, et al., (1999) reported that 97 percent of the international adolescent adoptees in their sample had been marginalized based on their physical appearance, with 97 percent occurring with peers

and 3 percent stemming from interactions with non-biologically related adults. Unfortunately in another sample, 69.5 percent of international adult adoptees did not pursue help or assistance following experiences of marginalization (Mohanty, et al., 2007).

Sources of Minority Distress

Korean adoptees may experience minority stress from a variety of different sources and those experiences can impact identity, well-being, and a sense of belonging (Escobar, Nervi, & Gara, 2000). Sources of minority stress may emanate from: family, peers, minority groups (Kim, et al., 2010; Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008); or the societal and historical legacy of minority status within the adoptive and birth countries (Baden, et al., 2012). These instances of marginalization may impact one or multiple minority identities that Korean adoptees retain, such as race, ethnicity, adoptee status, or other visible and invisible identities (Baden, et al., 2012). However, marginalized aggressions toward Korean adoptees are developed through false assumptions based on physical features or their adoptee narratives (Docan-Morgan, 2010) and can contribute to distress and personal discomfort (Randolph & Holtzman, 2010).

Minority distress due to race and ethnicity. Korean adoptees experience minority stress due to their physical appearance, including race and ethnicity (Meier, 1999). Within their sample, most Korean adult adoptees reported most instances of minority stress were related to race and not their adoptee identity (Randolph & Holtzman, 2010). Nam Soon and Reid (2000) reported that starting in Kindergarten; Korean adopted children began noticing similarities and differences among peers regarding race and ethnicity. Korean adoptees may be perceived and excluded due to their physical

appearance or ethnic and racial identities (Alvarez, Juang, & Liang 2006). Goto, Gee, and Takeuchi (2002) noted that at least 20 percent of adult Chinese Americans within their sample experienced marginalization due to language, racial makeup, ethnicity, and accent. Moreover in a study conducted by Alvarez, et al., (2006), the researchers noted that 99 percent of the adult Asian American sample had witnessed racism towards another Asian American person.

Minority stress may emerge from the stereotype of Asian people as the perpetual foreigner (Trenka, 2011). Asian individuals are considered outsiders within the American society (Kim, 1999) due to physical features and prescribed ethnic stereotypes (Trenka, 2011). Specifically for female Korean adoptees, they reported personal encounters with ‘yellow fever,’ a phenomenon when Asian females are labeled as exotic, overly agreeable, and even submissive (Meier, 1999). These falsely developed beliefs promote unwanted relationship or sexual advances (Meier, 1999). Most Korean adoptee women from the sample reported feeling repulsed by men attracted to them solely due to Asian stereotypes, such as ‘yellow fever’ (Meier, 1999). Within the same sample, male Korean adoptees also reported being labeled as non-masculine and unattractive due to not meeting the societal expectancies of hyper-masculinity in America (Meier, 1999). Some male Korean adoptees noted the pursuit of active roles within masculine-endorsed activities to attenuate the negative perceptions of Asian male femininity (Meier, 1999).

Korean adoptees as a sub-group of Asian Americans may also experience the model minority myth. The model minority myth posits that members of the Asian American community are universally successful in education, employment, and financial measures of competence and achievement (Lee, et al., 2009). Moreover, it portrays

Asian Americans as acquiring success simply through a strong work ethic and productive social values despite historical and social inequality (Lee, et al., 2009). Korean Adoptees may experience this stereotype to a greater extent due to their assimilation and level of White cultural competence (Bergquist, 2003). The model minority myth further perpetuates that Asian Americans lack within-group differences and escape problems with social, economic, legal, and political issues (Lee, et al., 2009). More specifically, studies have connected the model minority myth with mental health considerations for Asian Americans. Leong and Lau (2001) noted that Asian Americans are at risk for being misdiagnosed or under diagnosed with mental health problems. The lack of proper care and access with Asian Americans and specifically Korean adoptees could impact this groups' ability to cope with difficulties related to identity, reculturation, trauma, or with interpersonal relationships (Leong & Lau, 2001).

Minority distress due to adoptee identity. For international adoptees, minority stress can originate from visible identities such as race and ethnicity or invisible identities such as being adopted. For Korean adoptees, these encounters attempt to question the validity of the adoptive family due to differences in race, biology, or the formation of the family (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Randolph & Holtzman, 2010; Kim, et al., 2013). Fisher (2003) noted that the formation of a family through adoption is regarded as non-normative when compared to families composed of biological children (Grotevant, et al., 2000). Transracial adoptees may face higher risks of marginalization due to visible physical differences between them and their adoptive parents (Grotevant, et al., 2000).

Multiple researchers have noted that adoptees and their narratives are commonly portrayed with stigma or prejudice (Fisher, 2003; Wegar, 2000), an example of social discrimination (Goffman, 1963). Adoptive children may experience others' intrusive questions related to challenging the validity of their adoptive family (Fisher, 2003). Examples may include adoptees being asked where they are "really" from or to provide rationale for why they were adopted (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Kim, et al., 2010; Randolph & Holtzman, 2010). These related questions instigate segregation between the adoptee as an individual and the family as a unit; or it may undermine the level of connection the adoptee may have with their adoptive family (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Kim, et al., 2013; Randolph & Holtzman, 2010).

Minority distress from adoptive family members. Research has found that one primary source of minority stress for Korean adoptees originates from members of their own adoptive family. Korean adult adoptees in the sample noted feeling othered or excluded by individuals within their own adoptive families (Ramsey & Mika, 2011). This was echoed by a sample of multiracial adult adoptees who noted their status within the adoptive family was also challenged by extended family members (March, 1995). Samuels (2009) found in a sample of adult multiracial adoptees that nine out of 25 participants reported instances of racially-charged encounters with family members (Samuels, 2009). For minority-race adoptees, there are additional adjustments that occur when confronting instances of minority distress within 'White' dominant familial systems (Grotevant, 1997; Docan-Morgan, 2010). Adoptive parents may avoid dialogue regarding minority identities or even mandate the Korean adoptee to sever linguistic or cultural ties (Ramsey & Mika, 2011). These actions may influence the adoptees'

multiple minority identity development by solely adopting the adoptive parent's culture, experiencing identity confusion, or sacrificing their connectedness to racial, ethnic or cultural communities (Kim, et al., 2010).

Minority distress from Korean Americans or native South Koreans. Korean adoptees may experience minority distress from Korean Americans and native South Koreans. Korean adult adoptees in the sample reported instances of minimizing experiences related to the validity of their ethnic identity from Korean Americans, which led to insecurities when returning to South Korea (Meier, 1999; Langrehr, et al., 2015). When interacting with Korean Americans, Korean adult adoptees felt othered due to not exemplifying culturally congruent attitudes, values, knowledge or behaviors (Kim, et al., 2010; Ramsey & Mika, 2011; Meier, 1999). Korean adult adoptees reported receiving demeaning remarks regarding the genuineness of being racially Asian or culturally Korean when challenged by peers (Ramsey & Mika, 2011; Kim, et al., 2010; Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

Korean adoptees may face minority distress from encounters with Korean Americans along with native South Koreans (Ramsey & Mika, 2011). Korean adult adoptees experienced stigma from native South Koreans regarding their adoptee status, lack of blood line, and diminished connection to the Korean heritage (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Walton, 2015). In South Korea, one cultural norms that is emphasized ties your personal identity to the status of your biological family and how that tradition is discontinued once you are adopted (Walton, 2012; Hayes & Kim, 2007). Lee Shiao and Tuan (2008) and Meier (1999) noted that Korean adult adoptees in their samples reported invalidating experiences with native South Koreans due to their pursuit of birth family

reunions or stigma related to their abandonment and adoptee identity. Specifically for Korean adoptees, marginalized experiences within South Korea may be related to the level of Korean cultural integration by the adoptee through: culturally-appropriate knowledge or behaviors (Prebin, 2008; Meier, 1999), language ability (Ramsey & Mika, 2011), and biological family relationships (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Walton, 2012).

Coping with Minority Distress

Diaz-Guerrero (1979) reported two distinct mechanisms for coping with experiences of minority distress: active and passive coping. Passive coping occurs when the individual sacrifices their own well-being and sense of self to accommodate the expectancies of the dominant or new cultural system (Diaz-Guerrero, 1979). This technique is utilized to escape or assuage the severity of the abuse from the majority group (Basow, et al., 2008). Active coping is a preemptive approach toward combating minority distress by changing the environment or contexts without sacrificing the person's multiple minority identities (Diaz-Guerrero, 1979).

For Korean adoptees, there are examples of passive and active coping when experiencing minority stress. For passive coping, Korean adult adoptees in the sample reduced minority stress by avoiding or minimizing the importance of their multiple minority identities and embraced their white racial and cultural identity (Docan-Morgan, 2010). Passive coping may also occur when Korean adoptees attempt to deny the salience of minority identities when interacting in multiple environments (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999, p. 43). This may take the form of minimizing identity differences or reducing the intensity of the conflict by invalidating the importance of ethnicity, race, culture, or other social identifiers (Langrehr, et al., 2015).

Korean adoptees who adopt an active coping mechanism to minority distress may exhibit a spectrum of assertive reactions. Within a sample of Korean adult adoptees, they noted feeling angry and surprised when confronted with racial discomfort (Langrehr, et al., 2015). Langrehr, Yoon, Hacker, and Caudill (2015) noted that Korean adoptees may pursue confrontation by notifying others about the event or through executing verbal or physical responses. Some Korean adult adoptees in the sample who actively coped with marginalization developed a strong aversion to White or Korean people and attempted to seek an inclusive environment through other minority racial or cultural groups (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). Korean adoptees may identify as Asian American and as a member of a non-majority group following experiences of racial marginalization and cultural dissimilarity from White American sub-groups (Kim, et al., 2010). Some Korean adult adoptees in the sample found acceptance by Korean American groups due to shared experiences with racial discrimination and sought within-group membership (Kim, et al., 2010). Overall, Kim, et al., (2010) noted variation with Korean adoptees identifying with multiple minority memberships following the experiences of exclusion from minority or majority populations.

Factors Related to Coping with Minority Distress

Korean adoptees may experience distress related to multiple minority social identities. Research has been conducted with Asian American samples that detailed the impact of minority distress due to race or ethnicity. For instance, research with Asian American participants found that higher levels of ethnic identity were positively related to the increased impact of discrimination (Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008; Yoo & Lee, 2008; Yoo & Lee, 2005). Lee, et al., (2015) also noted that greater levels of ethnic

membership for Korean adoptees increased the salience of discriminatory experiences. Curiously, Seol, et al., (2015) noted adolescent Korean adoptees faced less perceived discrimination than their Korean American counterparts, which was congruent with the findings found between transracial minority and non-adopted minority individuals (Arnold, Braje, Kawahara, & Shuman, 2016).

For Korean adoptees, aspects that may contribute to resiliency from experiences of minority distress are: relational support and involvement by friends and family members (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007), adoptive parents (Barcons et al., 2012), and personal knowledge or skills (Hjemdal, et al., 2007). Ironically, membership or connectedness with other social and cultural minorities may serve as protective factors for Korean adoptees when they encounter minority stress (Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001). Korean adult adoptee participants noted their connection with minority groups also increased the efficacy of coping when experiencing invalidating comments regarding their racial, ethnic, cultural, or adoptee identities (Ramsey & Mika, 2011). Ferrari, et al., (2017) noted that a higher sense of belonging within ethnically diverse communities for international adult transracial adoptees reduced the impact of perceived discrimination on well-being.

In addition to the development of social supports and resources, experiences with socialization may also be related to minority distress among adoptees. For instance, racial and ethnic socialization has been negatively linked with minority distress for African American adoptees (Smith, et al., 2008) and transracial adoptees (Lee, 2003). Kim, et al., (2010) also reported that knowledge related to cultural norms and language were the primary determinants for whether Korean adult adoptees felt included or othered

within their cultural group. The development of social networks and connections within multiple cultural communities offers international adoptees with support, opportunities, and education regarding their country of origin to combat marginalization (Thomas & Tessler, 2007).

Consequences of Minority Distress

For Korean adoptees who experience minority distress, there may be unique consequences due to possessing multiple minority identities. Research conducted with Asian Americans, transracial adoptees, and international adoptees may be applicable for Korean international adoptees and their experiences with minority stress. Among adult Asian Americans, there was a positive relationship found between instances of discrimination with depression and anxiety symptomology (Cassidy, et al., 2004), relationship difficulties (Chen & Tryon, 2012), along with physical health concern (Lee & Ahn, 2011). Some Korean adult adoptees noted that experiences of exclusion contributed to not feeling a sense of belonging to any cultural or social in-group (Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Kim, et al., 2010).

Instances of marginalization for Asian Americans, international adoptees, and Korean adoptees have all been linked to problem behaviors. Specifically, ethnic and racial discrimination has been linked to maladaptive externalizing behaviors for adult Asian Americans (Park et al., 2013) and Korean adolescent adoptees (Lee, et al., 2015). Experiences of ethnic and racial discrimination for Korean adolescent adoptees have also been positively associated with internalizing behavioral problems and substance abuse (Lee, et al., 2015). After running moderating effects, the researchers noted that the association between discrimination experiences and externalizing problematic behaviors

was increased with the level of affective ethnic identification for Korean adolescent adoptees; affective ethnic identification was defined as feeling of connectedness toward an ethnic community (Lee, et al., 2015). However, this same moderating effect was not found for internalizing problem behaviors (Lee, et al., 2015).

For international or transracial adoptees, minority distress related to visible and invisible identities may also impact well-being or adjustment with their adoption placement. Within a sample of adopted children, experiences of marginalization due to their physical appearance or adoptive identity contributed to higher levels of adjustment difficulties with their adoptive family (Feigelman, 2000). Researchers found within a sample of adolescent international adoptees that 63 percent of the adults noted encounters when they were labeled as a foreigner; those experiences were negatively related to self-esteem (Cedarblad, et al., 1999). Greater levels of self-esteem were noted among a sample of international adult adoptees who experienced lower levels of marginalization based on ethnicity and adoptee status (Mohanty, et al., 2007).

Distress Outcomes

Adoption research has attempted to uncover the psychological outcomes for different groups of adoptees. The focus of this section will be covering studies that have addressed concerns related to well-being and self-esteem, mental health and substance use concerns, adjustment, and problem behaviors. Research has compared child and adolescent adoptee and non-adoptee samples across an assortment of different psychological and behavioral outcomes: self-esteem (Grotevant, 1997; Lanz, Iafrate, Rosnati, & Scabini, 1991); and familial adjustment (Ternay, Wilborn, & Day, 1985; Benson, et al., 1994; Borders, Black, & Paisley, 1998; Brodzinsky, 1987; Cederblad, et

al., 1999; Goldney, et al, 1996). Also, there have been longitudinal designs that attempted to capture differences in adjustment from childhood to early adulthood (Bohman & Sigvardsson, 1990, p. 96; Maugham & Pickles, 1990, p. 38). Other studies have compared adult adoptees and adult non-adoptees across an assortment of different outcomes: well-being, familial adjustment, and other mental health concerns (Askeland et al., 2015; Verhulst & Versluis-den Bieman, 1992); mother-child relationship (Burrow, Tubman, & Finley, 2004); along with frequency of problem behaviors (Escobar, Pereira, & Santelices, 2014; Feigelman, 2005; Keyes et al., 2008).

Transracial adoption research has offered mixed results when linking transracial adoptees with outcomes of identity, self-esteem, and well-being. Transracial adoption has been linked to negative consequences, including problems with self-esteem, identity development, and decreased belonging to their culture of origin (Brodzinsky, 1987). However, Friedlander (2003) noted that transracial adoptees demonstrated the ability to develop self-esteem, achieve identity integration, adjust to their new adoptive country, and develop bonds with their adoptive family (Westhues & Cohen, 1998). Korean adoptees' level of psychological distress may be influenced by: pre-adoption experiences (Kriebel & Wentzel, 2011); deprivation or neglect experienced in institutions (Sonuga-Barke & Rubia, 2008), and difficulties related to their adoptive identity (Brodzinsky, 2011). Additional variables may be closely related to trauma experienced by international adoptees caused by physical and cultural distance, loss and rejection of their birth family, and adapting to their new adoptive family (Meier, 1999). The lack of knowledge about their biological family history inhibits their ability to form a consistent story and may contribute to experiencing psychological pathology (Grotevant, 1997).

Well-being and Self-esteem Outcomes

Research with Korean adoptees has demonstrated an assortment of different factors related to levels of personal well-being and life satisfaction. Well-being will be generally defined based on a sense of personal acceptance and growth, along with the development of adaptive relationships (Basow, et al., 2008). Basow, et al., (2008) noted that personal well-being was positively predicted by higher levels of ethnic identity, emotionality related adoption experiences, socialization with Korean culture, and processing of loss related to birth parents among Korean adult adoptees. For the same sample of Korean adoptees, adoption-related adjustment predicted well-being when accounting for ethnic identity and cultural socialization (Basow, et al., 2008). Researchers have also found that well-being was negatively related to distress among Korean adoptee adolescents and adults respectively (Yoon, 2000; Lee, et al., 2004, p. 208).

Self-esteem will be operationalized as the adoptees' self-evaluation and their level of personal satisfaction (Juffer and van IJzendoorn, 2007). In a metaanalysis completed by Juffer and van IJzendoorn (2007), they found non-significant differences between 88 studies that compared the self-esteem of adoptees with their non-adoptee peers. These findings were replicated by Grotevant (1997) with a sample of adopted adolescents; and Lanz, Iafrate, Rosnati, and Scabini (1999) with Italian adult intercountry adoptees. Comparing transracial, same-race adoptees, and non-adopted children; there were no significant differences with levels of self-esteem (Benson, et al., 1994). Bagley (1993) reported that transracial adolescent adoptees recorded significantly higher levels of self-esteem when compared to White adolescent non-adoptees. Specifically, in regards to

self-esteem there were no significant differences noted between international and domestic adoptees or between female and male international adoptees (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007).

Using samples of international adoptees, studies have shown self-esteem was linked with minority identity and the adoptees' relationship with their adoptive family. Mohanty, et al., (2007) reported that within a sample of adult international adoptees, self-esteem had a positive association with levels of ethnic identity. Those results were echoed within a sample of Korean adoptee college and high school students (Basow, et al., 2008; Yoon, 2000) and Korean adult adoptees (Lee, et al., 2004, p. 212). For Chinese adolescent international adoptees, Tan & Jordan-Arthur (2012) reported that ethnic and adoptee identities independently were both positively associated with self-esteem. Beaupre, et al., (2015) also noted within a sample of Korean adult adoptees that the KAD-uncommitted profile had lower levels of life satisfaction when compared to Korean, KAD-strongly committed, and Adoptee clusters. The KAD-uncommitted profile reflected low scores in ethnic and adoptee identity; the Korean profile reflected high scores on ethnic identity and moderate scores on adoptive identity; KAD-strongly committed described moderate scores on adoptee identity and ethnic identity; and the adoptee profile comprised of high scores on adoptee and ethnic identity (Beaupre, et al., 2015).

For adult international adoptees, studies have demonstrated self-esteem was related to the type and quality of the relationship with their adoptive family members. Higher levels of familial problems were negatively associated with self-esteem (Cedarblad, et al., 1999) for a sample of adolescent international adoptees. Moreover,

researchers found a positive association between self-esteem and belongingness with one's adoptive family for international adult adoptees (Mohanty, et al., 2007). Mohanty, et al., (2007) also found a positive relationship between cultural socialization and self-esteem, which was mediated by the adult adoptees' belongingness to their adoptive family.

Mental Health and Substance Use Outcomes

Studies have noted that transracial and international adoptees experience a myriad of different mental health concerns and substance use diagnoses. Hjern, Lindblad, and Vinnerliung (2002) noted when transracial child and adolescent adoptees were compared with their Swedish siblings, the adoptees were five times as likely to experience addiction to drugs and up to four times as likely to experience severe mental health concerns, including suicide and psychiatric hospitalizations. Askeland, et al., (2015) reported significant differences between internationally adopted adolescents and non-adoptee adolescents; the international adolescent adoptees reported significantly higher scores for depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and perfectionism with all medium effect sizes. When comparing adolescent and adult international adoptees and domestic adoptees, Behle and Pinquart (2016) also noted that adolescent and adult international adoptees noted significantly higher levels of psychiatric diagnoses that included substance abuse, anxiety, depression, attention or hyperactivity, and psychosis. However, when comparing adolescent international adoptees to the national Swedish database based on age, there were no significant differences on the child behavioral checklist except for 'obsessive-compulsive' symptoms (Cedarblad, et al., 1999).

Multiple minority identity and the adoptees' relationship with their adoptive family have been related to mental health concerns for Asian international adoptees. For Chinese adolescent adoptees, those who identified strongly with their Asian American or Chinese peers noted significantly higher levels of ruminations or excessive thoughts (symptoms of anxiety), related to their adoption versus those Chinese adoptees who self-identified as White or other (Tan & Jordan-Arthur, 2012). Other studies with Korean adoptees have consistently shown that ethnic pride or greater ethnic identity development may be a buffering factor for psychological distress. Research conducted by Yoon (2000) with Korean adolescent adoptees demonstrated that pride in their ethnicity (collective self-esteem) was negatively associated with psychological pathology, including depression and anxiety. Moreover, research has been conducted that links psychological distress with the parent-child or the adoptee-sibling relationship. Yoon (2004) reported that having a Korean adoptee sibling, experienced belonging and closeness within the parent-child relationship, and had adaptive communication with adoptive parents were each negatively related to psychological distress experienced by the Korean child adoptee.

Adjustment Outcomes

Adjustment has been noted as an important variable within the adoptee experience. Adjustment will refer to the degree of a parent-child bond that is associated with the level of family functioning within the adoptive family (Lee, 2003). The parent-child adjustment has been investigated for international, transracial, intra-racial, and mono-racial adoptees. When comparing adoptees and non-adoptees with adjustment, multiple studies have shown no significant differences (Ternay, et al., 1985; Benson, et

al., 1994; Borders, et al., 1998; Brodzinsky, 1987; Cederblad, et al., 1999; Goldney, et al., 1996; Grotevant, et al., 2000). However, Askeland, et al., (2015) reported a significant difference between adolescent adoptees and non-adoptees in terms of adjustment within their sample. Two longitudinal studies in England and Sweden compared adjustment for adoptees and non-adoptees throughout the duration of their childhood. Both studies revealed significant differences in adjustment between the two groups of children were found from birth through early adolescence; however, there were non-significant differences from early adolescence through early adulthood for both samples (Bohman & Sigvardsson, 1990, p. 99; Maugham & Pickles, 1990, p. 39).

In a study completed by Simon and Alstein (1996), there were no reported differences with adjustment when comparing South Korean and black transracial adult adoptees versus adult white mono-racial adoptions. No differences in adjustment were found when comparing transracial and intraracial child adoptees (Bagley, 1993). Overall, there have been a plethora of studies that suggested international adoptees may be at an increased risk of maladjustment within adoptive families (Hawk & McCall, 2011; Lee, 2003; Merz & McCall, 2010; O'Brien & Zamostny, 2003; Rosnati, Barni, & Montirosso, 2010; Rueter, Keyes, Iacono, & McGue, 2009; Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1998; Berden, et al., 1990). However, other studies have demonstrated that international adult adoptees are generally well adjusted and develop a healthy self-concept (Bimmel, Juffer, Van IJzendoorn & Bakermans–Kranenburg, 2003; Juffer & Van IJzendoorn, 2005; Westhues & Cohen, 1997). Researchers have found that only a minority of international adult adoptees exhibited elevated difficulties with their parent-child adjustment (Bimmel, et al., 2003; Juffer & Van IJzendoorn, 2005).

There may be within-group differences that significantly alter the adjustment by international adoptees with their adoptive parents. Hoksbergen (1997) noted that adjustment related problems for adoptees were associated with the length of time in an orphanage and the number of different placements prior to being adopted. Adolescent international adoptees may undergo specific difficulties with adjustment due to the complexity with identity formation and integration (Bimmel, et al., 2003). The level of cohesion and conflict within the adoptive family may also buffer or exacerbate the parent-child adjustment for the Korean adoptee (Lee, 2016; Bimmel, et al., 2003; Juffer & Van IJzendoorn, 2005).

Problem Behavior Outcomes

There have been comparison studies between international adoptee, transracial, and non-adopted samples in regards to problem behaviors. From multiple studies, 70 to 80 percent of transracial adoptees demonstrated low levels of behavioral or emotional disturbances, with similar rates found for same-race adoption placements and non-adoptees (Benson, et al., 1994; Bimmel, et al., 2003; Lindblad, Hjern, & Vinnerljung, 2003; Bieman & Verhulst, 1995). When comparing behavioral problems in adult adoptees versus non-adoptees, there were significantly higher behavioral problems found in the adult adoptee groups (Escobar, et al., 2014; Feigelman, 2005; Keyes et al., 2008). Similar findings were found when comparing adult international adoptees and non-adoptees, the international adoptees exhibited higher levels of behavior problems (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007); both internalized and externalized with low effect sizes (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005). Roskam and Stievenart (2014) found different results when comparing the mean scores of problem behaviors between international adoptees and

non-adoptees; externalizing behaviors were much higher in the international adoptee group than the non-adoptee group with a medium effect size, but no differences were identified with problematic internalizing behaviors. Internalizing problems are difficulties that impact a person's level of social interaction and features concerning lower self-worth and confidence (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007). Externalizing behavioral problems are instances of physical and verbal aggression, violating legal or behavioral expectations, and lacking physical self-control (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007).

Other findings delineated the impact of international adoptees' age and gender in relation to the level of behavioral difficulties. Within their metaanalysis, Juffer and Van Ijzendoorn (2005) reported non-statistically significant differences between internationally adopted girls and boys in terms of behavioral difficulties. However, when researchers analyzed gender comparisons by combining domestic and international child and adolescent adoptees, boy adoptees demonstrated significantly more behavioral and emotional difficulties than girls in the sample (Feigelman, 2000). Also, internationally adopted children within early and middle childhood demonstrated fewer total behavioral difficulties than in adolescence (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005). Results found by Weinberg, Waldman, van Dulmen, and Scarr (2004) noted significantly higher problem behaviors during adolescence when comparing transracial adoptees with their non-adopted siblings.

Promulgated research has demonstrated the impact of institutional care or pre-adoption experiences with problem behaviors. Child adoptees who experienced institutional care exhibited higher levels of internalizing and externalizing behavioral

difficulties when compared to adoptees who were not in institutional care (Hawk & McCall, 2011). Le Mare and Audet (2014) found an association between length of "deprivation" and the number of externalized and general behavioral difficulties by child adoptees. Juffer & Van Ijzendoorn (2005) noted that higher levels of pre-adoption adversity were positively related to higher total behavioral difficulties and externalizing problems for international youth adoptees with low effect sizes. No differences were found for internalizing behaviors between the two groups of youth adoptees when separated based on pre-adoption distressful experiences (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005). Within a sample of Russian international adoptees, children who were 18 months or older when adopted exhibited greater internalizing and externalizing behaviors than those adopted younger than 18 months old (Hawk & McCall, 2011). However, Fisher, Ames, Chisholm, and Savoie (1997) noted that the conditions prior to adoption were related to the child adoptees' behavioral difficulties versus the age at adoption for a sample of Romanian international child adoptees; these results were replicated within another sample of international adolescent adoptees (Cedarblad, et al., 1999).

The functionality of the adoptive family appears to influence the behavioral difficulties observed by international adoptees. For samples of international adolescent adoptees, higher levels of familial problems were positively associated with behavioral difficulties (Cedarblad, et al., 1999), but parent support showed no relationship with internalizing behavioral problems in a sample of international child adoptees (Roskam & Stievenart, 2014). Rueter, et al., (2009) noted within their primarily international child adoptee sample that frequencies of conflict between parents and children were significantly higher with adoptive children than with non-adoptees. Findings by Tan and

Marfo (2006) contradicted findings by Rueter, et al., (2009) and noted significant differences in behavioral difficulties between Chinese international adoptees and non-adoptee samples; with non-adoptees demonstrating higher levels of problematic behavioral conduct.

Mental Health Referrals

There is a lack of research that captures the trends of Korean adult adoptees seeking mental health treatment. The following results reflect the frequencies of mental health referrals for general adoptee samples. Through two metaanalyses, there was a large effect size found when comparing the number of mental health referrals between adult adoptees and adult non-adoptees (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005; Juffer and van Ijzendoorn, 2007). More specifically, domestic adult adoptees showed a significantly higher number of mental health referrals than their international adoptee counterparts with a low to moderate effect size (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005). 55 percent of domestic and international adoptive parents reported seeking mental health services due to behavioral or emotional challenges with their adoptive children (Feigelman, 2000). Adoptive children lack the volition when attending mental health treatment, which may inflate mental health referrals or utilization rates (Friedlander, 2003). Moreover, adoptive parents may be more inclined to seek out preventative mental health treatment for their children due to financial privilege and being informed about the potential psychological consequences from adoption agencies and organizations (Warren, 1992; Miller, at al., 2000).

Validity Questions Regarding the Psychological Outcome Results

There have been scholarly challenges regarding the procedural validity of findings related to adoptees and mental or behavioral health outcomes. One problem with pathologizing adoptees and their experiences may be related to the use of clinical or non-randomized samples (Grotevant et al., 2006), a variety of different evaluative variables (Hawk & McCall, 2011, and the lack of multiple reporters within a study (De Los Reyes & Kazdin, 2005; Epstein, et al., 2004). Moreover, there have been significant differences found in favor of non-adoptee versus adoptee samples in terms of mental health or behavioral problems, but the effect sizes have been small-which meant the discrepancies in the scores were considered normative overall (Bimmel, et al., 2003; Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005; Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1996; Haaguard, 1998); this trend has also occurred when comparing non-transracial adoptee samples with samples of transracial adoptees (Benson, et al., 1994; Cedarblad, et al., 1999; Berden, et al., 1990).

A concern with generalizing the results of measuring distress with adoptee populations is quantifying the main effects of variables versus identifying possible moderating or mediating considerations (Grotevant, 2003). The author noted that at the extreme ends for adoptees and non-adoptees is where the variation between the two groups occurs (Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010). Also, if adoptees demonstrated maladaptive behaviors, it was consistent with a small minority versus generalizable to all adoptees (Roskam & Stievenart, 2014; Hjern, et al., 2002) and is reflective of the nuance observed within the adoptee experience (Lindblad, Weitoft, & Hjern, 2010; Roskam & Stievenart, 2014).

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research offers a unique approach when exploring the experiences of an underrepresented or marginalized community (Warner, 2008). Elucidating the intricate and nuanced backgrounds of Korean adoptees can be difficult (Kim, et al., 2010). However, integrating qualitative methods elevates the capability of capturing their first-person perspectives. This approach contrasts with the feasibility of quantitative methods; that would attempt to analyze the significance of encounters and narratives using numbers and frequencies (Adler, 1990). Qualitative methods offer strategies and techniques that strongly involve the idiographic exploration of thoughts, feelings, and actions; extensive contact between the researcher and participants; and confirmation of information through member reflections (Tracy, 2010; Creswell, 2013).

Warner (2008) noted that attempting to quantify salience of identity and context may be difficult. Using qualitative methods allows for the researcher and readers to note how identity can be dynamic and altered by the context versus a stagnant and consistent phenomenon (Warner, 2008). One way to acknowledge the intersections of identities as a process is by employing methods that assess identity formation temporally (Smith, et al., 2009). A qualitative methodological approach pays special attention to subjective experience and how this perspective is dependent on one's social location across a span

of time (Warner, 2008). Also, these experiential techniques provide information about the particular, partial, and emergent nature of meaning for a person's sense of self (Warner, 2008). This process can unveil that individual traits or characteristics can be movable and interrelated versus discrete and separate aspects of a person (Bowleg, 2008). The inclusion of qualitative inquiry decreases the chance of multi-dimensional experiences and views being captured as stationary (Bowleg, 2008). Data collected from each individual promotes the visibility of variation within-people and between peoples' experiences by empowering the subjective voice of each participant and collective voice of the sample (Creswell, 2013).

In counseling psychology, social justice has been noted as an important component for offering services and advocating for underserved or at-risk populations. Qualitative methods present a unique medium for describing and interpreting the views, thoughts, and reactions of the participants (Creswell, 2013). The first-person accounts made by the Korean adoptee participants represented an important opportunity to detail the intricate and dynamic nature of their narratives (Davies & Dodd, 2002). Through phenomenology and an intersectionality framework, this research unveiled the meaningful moments and shared lived experiences of the Korean adoptee participants (Warner, 2008; Smith, et al., 2009). I hoped that the conversations with the Korean adoptees would stimulate discussions regarding the development of additional services, programs, and resources within micro and macro-level systems (Vera & Speight, 2003). Moreover, as a future counseling psychologist, I want to describe and interpret the experiences of Korean adoptees through a strengths-based and inclusive approach.

Phenomenology

Creswell (2013) noted phenomenology is the investigation of shared lived experiences among a group of individuals. Moreover, it attempts to describe the underlying shared essence and the collectively expressed meaning for participants who have undergone the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology allows for the synthesis of information from multiple subjective sources and seeks to develop a consistent and well-developed conjoint description of an experience (Creswell, 2013). This approach emphasizes the importance of investigating the reactions, feelings, or thoughts noted by the participants when reporting the results from the research (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenology has been applied within multiple fields, including social sciences, education, and the health sciences (Creswell, 2013).

Hein and Austin (2001) noted there was not an absolute way to complete phenomenological research. Within phenomenology, the researcher possesses maneuverability and flexibility to tailor the data collection and analysis process to answer the aims of the research (Hein & Austin, 2001). Groenewald (2004) reported that researchers using phenomenology should be prepared to become intimately involved throughout the data process and be transparent regarding their involvement. Moreover, bracketing by the researcher is imperative in phenomenology. Bracketing occurs when the researcher separates previous knowledge or experience from the data collection and analysis process (Creswell, 2013). Through the application of bracketing, the researcher attempts to mitigate any hindrances from identifying and recording the phenomenon when reviewing and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2013; Laverty, 2003).

Generally, phenomenology has generally been classified using two different categories, transcendental and hermeneutic phenomenology (Hein & Austin, 2001). Starting in the 19th century, Edmund Husserl initiated the development of phenomenology, but specifically adopted transcendental phenomenology (Strasser, 1965). Husserl believed that transcendental phenomenology was the study of consciousness using the mind (Hein & Austin, 2001). Moreover, he noted that consciousness enabled the observation and description of phenomenon (Hein & Austin, 2001). Husserl believed that bracketing past backgrounds, biases, and prejudices was important when noticing the particular experiences and realities noted by the participants within phenomenological research (Laverty, 2003).

Another notable innovator within phenomenology was Martin Heidegger. Heidegger was also renowned during the 19th century and spurred the development of hermeneutic phenomenology, the meaningful understanding of lived existence (Laverty, 2003). He disagreed with Husserl that bracketing was possible or even helpful when conducting phenomenological research (Laverty, 2003). Heidegger noted that it was essential to be attuned to your interpretative frames and backgrounds when observing and creating meaning of phenomenon (Laverty, 2003). Husserl and Heidegger are still impacting the current study of phenomenology through the modern versions of hermeneutic and transcendental phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). Aspects of both hermeneutic and transcendental phenomenology will be applied within the interpretative phenomenological approach.

Interpretative Phenomenology

Within phenomenology, there are different approaches and procedures to collect and analyze data. Specifically, IPA offers a structure for both obtaining and reviewing the data following direct interactions with the participants. IPA's most important aim is to investigate how individuals and groups develop meaning related to their experiences with other people or contexts (Smith, et al., 2009). IPA utilizes the descriptions and recollections by the participant as the basis of the data analysis (Smith, et al., 2009). Through subjective meaning making, the researcher attempts to connect the experiences noted by the participants with congruent codes and shared themes (Smith, et al., 2009).

Smith, et al., (2009) noted several assumptions reported within the IPA framework. For both the researcher and participants, the understanding of one's personal world necessitates insight into their subjective experience (Smith, et al., 2009). Interactions with the participants occur under the pretense that they are actively engaged with an assortment of elements regarding their experience; including culture, language, and relationships (Smith, et al., 2009). I took steps to examine in-depth and detailed accounts of each participant's day-to-day experiences to notice peculiarities or nuances (Smith, et al., 2009). I was connected with the participants' retelling of their experiences by identifying meaning from their recollections (Smith, et al., 2009). Moreover, I incorporated introspection regarding their background and values when choosing to interact with the participants' experiences (Smith, et al., 2009). Lastly, I was devoted toward building interpretations based on careful reflexive methods and ensuring there was an empirical basis from the participant's recall of events (Smith, et al., 2009).

Within IPA, there are three primary aspects related to the phenomenological approach: eidetic reduction, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, et al., 2009). In eidetic reduction, the researcher attempts to identify and consolidate the essential aspects within the phenomenon (Smith, et al., 2009). This occurred during data analyses, when I initially developed the thematic codes for within-case responses and then formulated shared themes across cases with the other participants (Smith, et al., 2009). Moreover, eidetic reduction emphasizes the usefulness of bracketing (previously mentioned) (Smith, et al., 2009). For instance, bracketing was an important consideration for me as a Korean adoptee when examining the data and offering support for thematic descriptions representative of participants' experiences (Smith, et al., 2009).

Hermeneutics describes the process of understanding and developing meaning of a person's experience (Smith, et al., 2009). This is done in two steps, through a "double hermeneutic process" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Initially, I encouraged the participant to generate meaning from their own narratives and share that information with me. Following this step, I pursued my own meaning making process related to the subjective experiences of each participant to understand the purpose and significance of their responses (Smith, et al., 2009). Moreover, the hermeneutic circle illustrates continuous interaction with the qualitative data and draws connections between the part-whole and whole-part relationships. Within the hermeneutic circle, meaning is drawn from examining the reciprocal links between the generalized whole and the specific parts and how they inform each other (Smith, et al., 2009).

Moreover, the incorporation of the researchers' interpretation may supplement information that is distinctly missing from the participants (Smith, et al., 2009). I was reflective and mindful of how my own experiences and encounters with Korean adoption were entering my observation and interpretation of the data.

Idiography is described as a thorough and detailed examination of information and a process that attempts to describe how the participant understands their experience within a context (Smith, et al., 2009). Using idiography, the approach assisted me with developing deep and broad connections with individual Korean adoptee experiences while incorporating a bevy of psychological constructs and environments (Smith, et al., 2009). I completed this through in-depth interviews and forming notes or codes based on specific examples shared by the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This procedure validated the individual participants' views prior to organizing their experiences through the shared lens of the other Korean adoptees (Smith, et al., 2009).

IPA is an approach that extends flexibility to the researcher when reviewing and making sense of the data collected (Smith, et al., 2009). This is primarily noted during the data analysis phase when the researcher: interprets the data, develops themes, and solidifies the shared essence across the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). However as previously noted, the assimilation of bracketing ensures the researcher is not overtly hindered by their previous values, attitudes, and beliefs when examining the data (Creswell, 2013).

Using IPA as a qualitative approach is applicable for examining the shared lived experiences of Korean adoptees through the lens of intersectionality. In my study, I committed to immersing myself into the data and relying on the subjective experiences of

the participants within the research process. My intention was to develop an interview protocol that addressed issues related to multiple minority identities, structural and personal examples of inequality, and within-group differences among the participants (Warner, 2008). Moreover, I uplifted the voices of the Korean adoptees, while integrating the environmental and contextual factors related to their subjective and collective experiences (Smith, et al., 2009; Warner, 2008).

During the data analysis portion of the research, my personal background in counseling psychology and as a Korean adoptee offered a unique background to engage, express, and interpret the information collected (Smith, et al., 2009). Throughout this process, I wanted to be aware and utilized a reflexive journal to continuously reflect regarding my thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about my personal research process. I conversed with members of my dissertation committee who assisted me with forming concise ideas, confirmed protocols, and discussed reactions to the data (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p. 108). Ultimately, the coding and thematic development was directed toward identifying the shared lived experiences of Korean adoptees and the collective essence among the participants (Smith, et al., 2009).

Reflexivity

For IPA, the incorporation of reflexivity and introspection are important aspects of the approach (Smith, et al., 2009). Shaw (2010) noted that based on our subjective position in the world, we continuously understand our self, the environment, and the relationship between the two from our specific view (Shaw, 2010). This was particularly salient for me as a Korean adoptee to be mindful and aware of my own values, attitudes, and beliefs when making sense of the participants' experiences. Shaw (2010) reported

that the use of interpretation was unavoidable when conducting qualitative research and should be accounted for throughout the research process. I remained consciously aware of how my identity as a Korean adoptee, counseling psychology student, and researcher impacted the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data.

Shaw (2010) reported two goals of reflexivity. The first is to be aware and control your reactions with the participants during direct contact (Shaw, 2010). The second is the capability of forming a novel perspective after reviewing the participants' experiences (Shaw, 2010). The IPA approach offers guidance regarding reflective actions noted by researchers. One tool noted by Shaw (2010) is the inclusion of a researcher background section. This states the researcher's positionality when interacting with participants and when attempting to answer the research aims. An additional recommendation is the use of a reflexive journal. This serves as a tool to identify any biases, assumptions, or judgments that occur during data collection or analyses (Shaw, 2010; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I proactively noted and bracketed my personal responses when directly interacting with the participants or the collected data (Smith, et al., 2009).

Specifically, during data collection and analysis, I used the reflexive journal to record comments or notes when reviewing interactions with the participants (Shaw, 2010). During this process, I wanted to be reflexive of my own stances and views to attenuate the possibility of neglecting or omitting essential participant data (Smith, et al., 2009).

I ensured that my deductions were genuine depictions of the Korean adoptee experience and collective essence (Smith, et al., 2009). The completion of the reflexive journal elevated the standards of transparency and rigor within this research (Tracy, 2010).

The use of the reflexive journal explored and revealed my personal biases, thoughts, and reactions following each interview and review of both interview transcripts with each of the participants. I used these observations to further inform my approach toward data collection and data analysis congruent with the sense making process detailed with IPA (Shaw, 2010).

Reflexive Autobiography

Self-identification: Korean cis-gender male adoptee, future counseling psychologist, student, and researcher. I believe the identities that were most salient for me in this study were being a Korean international adoptee, future counseling psychologist, student, and researcher. My own experiences, conversations, and encounters with other Korean adoptees have left an indelible mark through my own life transitions and decisions. My experience as an international adoptee has shaped how I view, interact, and process the world. It has influenced the development of my personal values and my avenues for decision-making.

I interact constantly with my Korean adoptee identity. It has opened my eyes to the intricacies of people and the inquisitiveness to learn about others' views. My experience has humbly reminded me about the assumptions of normalcy. It has thrown into question static, discrete, and separated states of identity and offered an exciting perspective that includes the importance of context and exposure to non-normative

pathways. I have sought out connection with my birth country and birth parents with no tangible results. I am a member of an adopted family that has been fraught with inconsistent closeness. I have attempted to build my life around some of the things that are continually missing and absent-deep bonded interpersonal connection, feelings of intimacy, and the development of trust with people and communities. My passion for completing this research stemmed from my own curiosity to learn about the experiences of others and provide an opportunity to elevate the voices of a historically marginalized group. I hoped to bring awareness to the dynamic, complex, and intricate nature of experience for this unique collection of people. Lastly, I continue to feel humbled and honored to have undertaken this study for my dissertation.

For the purposes of this research, I see myself as both a researcher and participant. As a fellow Korean adoptee, I aspired to provide a strong platform that was representative of the shared experiences of the participants through curiosity, humility, and openness. I hoped to use my past experiences in therapy, consultation, and research to guide ethical decisions, interactions with the participants, and produce a legitimate scholarly work. Moreover due to my own experiences as a Korean adoptee, I wanted to be aware and continually reflect as the research process proceeded. I wanted to explore experiences other Korean adoptees have had and strived to develop a bond with each participant. I was motivated to accurately interpret the shared experiences of the Korean adoptees and give the readers riveting accounts and responses of minority distress, socialization/reculturation, multiple minority identities, and distress. At the end of this research, I wanted to accurately represent the individual and collective experiences of the participants through the shared essence of the phenomenon.

My intent when starting this project was to bracket my experience as a Korean adoptee from my participants and the collected data, however I found that my identity as a Korean adoptee was very present throughout the study. This was something me and the participants noticed. During the interview process, many of the them vocalized or referenced that aspect of identity. As time went along, I confronted challenges with disclosing personal information about myself, particularly if I was directly asked, versus refocusing the attention back on each individual's lived experiences. I attempted to balance appreciating the keen interest noted by the Korean adoptees, while also being responsive to the boundaries around the researcher-participant relationship. I found that being a Korean adoptee was an inherently salient and important factor within this experience, but it brought forth an internal conflict between maintaining boundaries, while also wanting to validate the curiosity shown by the participants.

Due to these personal struggles, it made it very meaningful for me to leave room at the end of the interview process for each person to ask me questions and also share their experiences during the study. This process was even more important because of the inherent power differential noted with the research. Following the interviews, I felt freer to share some of my experience as a fellow Korean adoptee, versus as a researcher and graduate student. I attempted to be transparent and authentic in my responses with all of the participants in the research process. I do strongly hypothesize that my status as a Korean adoptee was a significant factor in terms of contributing to the interviews and the data collection process.

Another reaction I had during the study was balancing my identity as a researcher and therapist when speaking with the Korean adoptees. Particularly when speaking about distress, struggles, and barriers, I found myself thinking how I could support these and other Korean adoptees in a therapy context. My position as a researcher was supplemented with my training as a counseling psychologist and thus allowed me the confidence to explore personal encounters with the participants. At times, I wanted to transition from the study to therapy. This tendency reminded me of demonstrating curiosity, openness, and empathy with all of the participants. This framework and perspective assisted me with exploring experiences with the Korean adoptees that may have reflected various emotional reactions and cognitive stances. I believe my ability to be flexible and maintain focus on the interviewees contributed to examining depth and breadth. Moreover, my familiarity with different coping strategies and sources of distress were vital when identifying narratives and collective themes during data analysis.

My training as a therapist and a researcher in counseling psychology was also salient in another aspect of the study, the identification and sensitivity toward intersectionality and identity salience with the participants. My stance of being aware and sensitive to the theory of intersectionality was consistent. I believe the positionality of intersectionality shined through in terms of acknowledging individual differences, within-group differences, and the identification of multiple aspects of self within and over time. During those moments, I really found myself learning and being curious about how the experiences were shared and also unique among the Korean adoptees. This reflexivity fit well with highlighting those aforementioned characteristics of intersectionality, while also denoting the stories of both the collective and the individual

participants in the study. This was also evident when observing the Korean adoptee's experiences with marginalization, invalidation, racism, and other forms of oppression. These occasions not only marked individual encounters, but also highlighted the systemic, cultural, and social rules that reinforced those instances. This theoretical framework of intersectionality aided the contextualization of narratives noted by the participants and how they coincided with cultural or systemic norms, values, and attitudes.

An additional stance of positionality I took as a researcher was the inclusion of different identities, backgrounds, socialization, and personal development over time. One example occurred when one participant shared how different elements of being a Korean, Asian, and women were directly related to an event that involved the salience of her multiple identities. Given the nature of the topics and the dynamic nature of being a human, I found myself having to be nimble and balance the varying contexts and the elements of experience. I also attempted to notice what was and wasn't being spoken about. The movement through and within experience by the Korean adoptees was drastic and yet effortless for each participant when they attempted to dispel and examine their own journey.

This process of shifting through identity was also accompanied by the movement through different environmental contexts and settings. This occurred with numerous Korean adoptees as they detailed their reactions to being in the United States versus in South Korea. This fluidity noted by the participants when speaking about their stories reinforced my reflexivity of being alert and aware of the different contexts, identities, and changes in the environment simultaneously. My commitment toward curiosity and

mindfulness helped me to engage these different pieces of information during the interview, but informed how the data analysis would occur. These narratives and collective experiences shared by the participants necessitated themes that encompassed elements of movement, malleability, and connected to the context to capture each moment. I also thought my previous literature review and anecdotal experiences with Korean adoptees offered important background information that broadened my confidence and comfort with attempting to identify, analyze, and make sense of the themes during this process.

As the interviews were completed and the thematic analyses had been reviewed many times. I noticed there were different instances where the humanity and the relevance of the participant's experiences really touched me. There were times in both the interviews and reviewing the transcripts where the stories really affected me emotionally or cognitively. Despite attempting to remain bracketed, it was easy for me to be reminded of personal events and experiences I have had personally or with others. In that way, those moments impacted me in a way that refocused me on the humanity of each person and the collective experience. For instance, it reminded me of my own trips to Korea; my socialization with the Korean culture and people; instances of minority distress; identity questioning and formation; searching for birth parents; identity salience; coping with my adoption; sources of support; and relationships with others. My stance of wanting to provide services, consultation, and support to Korean adoptees again stood out. The positionality of that desire permeated my interactions with each person and their recorded experiences. It stood out in my analysis of the data and write up of the results. It was represented in my attempts to be thorough, comprehensive, and valid. My

personal aims, goals, and aspirations strongly and consistently were present with this study. I believe that Korean adoptees and their families could benefit from resources, services, and programs offered within the field of counseling psychology.

Data Collection

Sampling

The Korean adoptee participants had to meet certain criteria to be eligible for this research study. The criterion for sampling included that they were: at least 18 years old at the start of their participation; were adopted to an American family with at least one adoptive parents who was of a different race; had visited South Korea at least one time since they were adopted from their birth country; open and willing to share their personal opinions and experiences in two interviews; and able to understand and fluently speak English (Creswell, 2013). Meeting all of these criteria did not necessarily mean that the Korean adoptees would be selected for participation.

Purposeful sampling was also implemented for participant selection due to the specific nature of examining the experiences of Korean adoptees (Smith, et al., 2009). Smith, et al., (2009) also recommended a sample that was somewhat homogeneous to extract meaningful information regarding the phenomenon in question. However, some variability in terms of the age, interactions with Korea or the Korean culture, education level, location, vocation, and other salient demographic information could potentially increase the transferability of the findings to other members in the Korean adoptee community (Smith, et al., 2009). The inclusion of snowball sampling was another strategy for developing connections with Korean adoptee participants. Snowball sampling utilizes the relationships and social networks of active participants to extend the

search for people who meet the sample criteria (Creswell, 2013). I hoped this approach would support the additional recruitment of eligible participants and build a trusting bond more rapidly through the mutual relationship (Creswell, 2013).

Recruitment

I wanted to utilize an amalgamation of agencies, organizations, and social networks when recruiting potential Korean adoptee participants. In order to reach a large and broad Korean adoptee population, I reviewed and identified online Korean adoptee social networks and communities that provide services, resources, or information. Following the completion of the IRB application and receiving IRB approval for my study, I used my Advertisement Flyer (see Appendix A) about the study, I asked six different Korean adult adoptee Facebook pages, along with three different non-profit organizations located throughout the United States to disseminate information about my study. These group provided permission to post the Advertisement Flyer (see Appendix A) about the study. The Advertisement Flyer (see Appendix A) asked all eligible and interested Korean adult adoptees to contact me directly through email to receive further instructions about participation or to ask additional questions about the study.

The Advertisement Flyer (see Appendix A) asked participants to contact the researcher to demonstrate an interest in participating. After the Korean adoptees directly messaged me, I also sent out the Letter of Introduction (see Appendix B) that contained additional information about the study, including risks, benefits, and details about the study. I asked the Korean adoptees to email me once they had read the email. Following that, I provided them with links to complete the Qualtrics information; that included the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) and the Demographic Survey (see Appendix

D) through email. All of the interested Korean adult adoptees accessed and completed those forms via Qualtrics. All data collected through Qualtrics was encrypted for additional security purposes. The Qualtrics Demographic Survey (see Appendix D) sought identifying information about the potential participants. The Qualtrics Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) included additional information about the study, including potential risks, benefits, voluntary nature of their participation, procedures, and ways to contact the DU IRB. Following their review of the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D), the participants were asked for an electronic signature. The researcher received notification about the signed Qualtrics consent forms.

There were 55 Korean adult adoptees who completed the Demographic Survey (see Appendix D) and the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) via Qualtrics. 53 individuals had completed all of the questions and met criteria for being a participant in the study; the other two individuals did not complete the entirety of both forms on Qualtrics. After careful review of the participants' Demographic Survey (see appendix D), I separated the Korean adult adoptees into three age brackets (18-29, 30-39, and 40+). I then determined the number of participants that would represent each age bracket based on the proportion of people who completed both forms on Qualtrics. This decision was an attempt to diversify the sample and address the possible impact of generational effects on the overall shared experiences.

After the individuals were separated by the age brackets, I still needed to narrow down the number of participants for the study. I identified gender as another consideration. I reviewed the names of those who had completed the documentation on Qualtrics and emails were then sent to the individuals who had completed the

Demographic Survey (see Appendix D) and the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) first. They were asked to confirm their continued interest in the study within one week; all of the individuals emailed me back within one week.

The initial eight participants represented all three of the age brackets and appeared to be equally split between men and women. The gender identification of all the participants was then later confirmed during the interview process. Seven of the eight initial participants agreed to setup the first interview using Zoom. Due to the lack of a response by one of the initial eight participants, I contacted and selected another Korean adult adoptee to participate. Overall, there was a total of eight participants, the characteristics of each participant can be seen in Table 1 below. Following the conclusion of the participation selection process, I notified all of the Korean adoptees that expressed interest and thanked them for their willingness to be a participant.

Participant characteristics. There were 8 total participants who agreed to participate and completed both interviews (see Table 1). The ages of the participants when they completed the informed consent were: 18, 21, 29, 31, 33, 36, 44, and 45. There were four men and four women selected within the sample. There were attempts made by the researcher to have variation among the participants in regards to gender and age. The states that the participants resided in included: Minnesota, California, New York, Colorado, and Utah. In terms of qualifying for the research study, all participants endorsed the following questions: adopted into an American family with at least one parent who was of a different race; all were at least 18 years of age; all had visited South Korea at least one time since they were adopted from their birth country; and were able to understand and fluently speak English. Also, all of the participants, except one person

had earned at least a bachelor's degree. The one participant who had not completed their degree was currently enrolled in college. All of the participants self-reported on the pre-screening questionnaire that they were adopted within a year of their birth. Also, only five out of the eight participants noted that they had initiated a birth search.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Characteristics

Initials (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Children
AC (Abby)	44	F	Married	Three
BH (Brett)	46	M	Divorced	One
MM (Maggie)	31	F	Divorced	None
MS (Mike)	21	M	Never Married	None
PS (Parker)	36	M	Never Married	None
R (Ramona)	29	F	Never Married (Committed Relationship)	None
SG (Samantha)	18	F	Never Married	None
WK (William)	33	M	Married	Two

Interviews

After the recruitment of the eight Korean adult adoptees, using the Email to Direct Selected Participants (see Appendix E) we confirmed when the best meeting times would be to conduct the interviews. I also offered participants the ability to receive the first and second protocols, Interview Protocol Part I (see Appendix F) and Interview Protocol Part II (see Appendix G) prior to each meeting. For the first interview all but one participant

requested the Interview Protocol Part I (see Appendix F) prior to the arranged Zoom meeting. However, for the second interview all of the participants requested the Interview Protocol Pat II (see Appendix G) prior to the second arranged interview.

For IPA, a semi-structured interview is the primary means for data collection (Smith, et al., 2009). The goal of the interview was to elicit detailed, specific, and memorable memories from the Korean adoptee participants (Smith, et al., 2009). Moreover, I asked questions that captured the persons' feelings, thoughts, and reactions to their experiences. The semi-structured interview protocol offered me the combination of structure and flexibility when managing the flow of the interview, develop a working relationship with the participant, and provide enough time for sense making (Smith, et al., 2009). Ultimately, the interviews contained enough depth and breadth of information for comprehensive analyses to occur regarding their experiences with multiple minority identities, socialization/reculturation experiences, minority distress, and mental health (Smith, et al., 2009). Semi-structured interviews have previously been used with international adoptee samples (Ramsay & Mika, 2011; Darnell, et al., 2017; Langrehr, et al., 2015; Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008) in qualitative research.

All participants were able and willing to complete both interviews using Zoom. Prior to the meeting, each participant received an email with instructions on how to gain access to the Zoom meeting. There were a few technical challenges noted during the interview process with two of the participants due to internet connection concerns, noted by Deakin and Wakefield (2014) as possible complicating factors with using video conferencing. Using Zoom as the medium for completing the interviews had many benefits as well. Together, the participants and I were able to easily schedule and finalize

meeting times that were mutually convenient. Also, using virtual meetings meant I could complete the research study with Korean adult adoptees all over the United States (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). I was aware and conscientious of having the virtual interview conducted in a space that was quiet, secure, and private without distractions (Warren & Karner, 2010).

Prior to the start of the first interview, I introduced myself and the aims of the study using the Pre-Interview Script for Interview One (see Appendix H). Moreover, I reviewed the format of their participation, the consent form, and reiterate the importance of sharing important and meaningful information. I repeated that there are no "wrong and right" answers and prompted them to ask any questions or concerns regarding their participation throughout the interview process. Also, I referenced the Pre-Interview Script for Interview One (see Appendix H) when reminding the participant they may decline to answer any question voluntarily and they could utilize pauses to collect their thoughts or reactions during both interviews (Warren & Karner, 2010). Lastly, I sought the participant's permission prior to starting the audiotape (Warren & Karner, 2010). The interviews were recorded using audio and visual devices; both of which were accessible when completing the transcription (Warren & Karner, 2010).

Specifically, with IPA it is standard to tailor the interview based on observations that I have of myself and the participant (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). These clues assisted me with seeking greater clarification, delaying a line of questioning, or continuing on with the protocol (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I think that my previous training in counseling psychology and therapy helped to guide my interactions with the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I wanted to observe when the person was

displaying signs of resistance, avoidance, and emotionality during the conversation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) recommended that the interviewer is trained with noticing certain emotionally provoking answers and prepared to respond with sensitive answers with the individuals (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I wanted to show respect for their experiences and perspectives, while being genuine and curious in my questions and comments (Warren & Karner, 2010).

First interview. The purpose of the first interview was to build rapport and trust, while co-creating a comfortable and relaxed ambience. Moreover, I hoped to promote a conversation that reflected my genuine and authentic interest in their experiences. It was my responsibility to help facilitate the optimal environment for the participant. The first interview explored the Korean adoptees' experiences with multiple minority identities, socialization/reculturation experiences, and encounters with identity salience. Following the conclusion of the first interview, I asked each person to check their emails in the next two weeks for a copy of the transcript from our first interview. The participants were given two weeks to review the transcript and supply any edits, modifications, or comments. After either the two-week period passed or the Korean adult adoptee provided their feedback, then I went on to schedule the second interview through email.

Second interview. The purpose of the second interview was to answer any previous questions or comments from the first interview and continue to ask in-depth exploratory questions about their experience. Moreover, I repeated the participants' rights in terms of their voluntary participation and agency to answer to any or all of the interview questions. During the second interview, I discussed issues with salience of identity, minority distress, and coping. At the end of the interview protocol, I included a

general wrap up question. I intended to provide time for the participant to add or omit any information that was discussed in the first or second interview. Also, I reminded the participant to review the transcript of the second interview for editing or clarification purposes. As with following the first interview, the participants were asked to review and provide feedback from the second interview transcript within a two-week period of time. If they did not respond during that timeframe, it was assumed that they did not have any edits, suggestions, or comments.

Debriefing

Warren and Karner (2010) noted that debriefing is an integral piece when completing interviews with participants. I wanted to provide time for the participant to ask questions, clarify the aims of the research, and gather any additional information about the study after the secpnf interview (Warner & Karner, 2010; APA, 2002). Also, I encouraged the interviewee to feel more involved and connected to the larger goals of the research. I used this period of time to check in with the Korean adoptee to inquire about their experience during the interview and to point them toward additional supports and resources if they were needed (Warner & Karner, 2010; APA, 2002). Due to the emotional aspects of the conversation, I checked in with the person about their emotionality related to our conversation prior to formally concluding their first and second interview (Warren & Karner, 2010). It was vital to collect information about the person's personal experience, both with me and their overall participation in the research. I documented notes during and after the completion of each interview (Smith, et al., 2009). The post-interview researcher notes offered me an opportunity to record my own thoughts, feelings or actions during and after the conversation (Kiesinger, 1998).

Moreover, I documented any relevant procedural reminders, insights, or takeaways from the interviews with each of the Korean adoptees (Oxley, 2016; Groenewald, 2004). I reviewed the researcher notes to reflect on my own personal process, including biases, beliefs, and reactions throughout the data collection phase (Kiesinger, 1998).

Data Analysis

Transcription

In addition to the researcher notes following the interviews with the participants, I also completed full and complete verbatim transcripts of each interview (Smith, et al., 2009). The interaction needed to be documented through transcribing to begin and complete the analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Oxley, 2016). There are certain standards that needed to be met when completing the transcription. For instance, I recorded all verbal and notable non-verbal communication that occurred during the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smith, et al., 2009). I used brackets to depict non-verbal communication or to signify breaks or pauses in the conversation (Bird, 2005). The complete transcript revealed important information about how the conversation unfolded between the participant and I. Also, the completion of the transcript was to ensure fidelity of the responses from the conversation and achieve transparency with the themes that were identified to support my conclusions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After completing the transcriptions, I completed member reflections (Tracy, 2010). Member reflections are a procedure that enabled the participants to review the transcripts of the interviews for any errors, omissions, or edits (Tracy, 2010). I sent the interview transcripts back to all of the Korean adoptee participants after the first and second interview. Moreover, the member reflection process solidified the co-

development of the interview and ensured accurate information was collected (Tracy, 2010). If the participants offered any comments or edits, that information was included in the final transcripts. After the transcripts were completed, I organized all of the data into word documents. This process alleviated some of the stress of accessing, storing, and identifying the interview information throughout the data collection and analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data Analysis

After all of the interviews were completed, and the transcriptions were given to the participants for member reflections, the data analysis was initiated. The data was organized and uploaded using the NVivo 12 Software (2019). Within IPA, Smith, et al., (2009) noted important principles that I should consider when completing the data analysis. The authors noted general and malleable steps to completing the analysis with repetitive and interpretative features (Smith, et al., 2009). I was continuously engaged with the data, through comments, notes, coding, and thematic development (Smith, et al., 2009). Also, I attempted to be flexible, creative, and practice perspective taking when making sense of the participants' experiences and highlighting their sense making process (Smith, et al., 2009). Throughout the different phases, there was a strong emphasis of maintaining transparency and fidelity from the initial notes, coding, and thematic conclusions using participant responses (Smith, et al., 2009). At the conclusion of the data analysis, I wanted to generate vivid and dynamic themes from the Korean adoptees' experiences. I sought to engage readers in the complexities, intricacies, and collective experiences of the participants.

Smith, et al., (2009) provide a non-linear, but comprehensive guide to conducting data analyses from an IPA perspective. Starting in the first phase and continuing on throughout the analyses, I completed countless reviews of the transcript information to initiate observations and reactions from the interviews (Smith, et al., 2009). Moreover as I actively engaged with the data, I recorded my thoughts and feelings in my reflexive journal following the conclusion of each interview transcript review prior to the data analysis (Smith, et al., 2009). This enabled me to report my observations, identify references in the material, and enact bracketing of material to inhibit my biases, values, or attitudes (Smith, et al., 2009).

For the first phase, "Reading and rereading the data" I completed readings and reviews of all the transcripts (Smith, et al., 2009). I completed in-depth line-by-line investigations one transcript at a time (Smith, et al., 2009). I wanted to become very familiar with the verbal and non-verbal exchanges, while focusing on the participants' sense making and meaningful experiences (Smith, et al., 2009). The second phase is called "Initial noting," I completed notes and comments that reflect my gut reactions to reviewing the transcripts using NVivo 12 (2019) (Smith, et al., 2009). During this phase, I documented the participants' descriptions of experiences that mattered to them and their significance to the person within assorted contexts (Smith, et al., 2009). Moreover, there are three types of general comments that are recommended for this stage: descriptive (what is said), linguistic (use of imagery or metaphors and depth of information), and conceptual comments (overarching awareness regarding key variables) (Smith, et al., 2009).

The third phase is called “Developing emergent themes,” where I identified the Korean adoptees’ associations between objects, settings, and experiences (Smith, et al., 2009). Following these observations and interpretations, I slowly developed themes using the Korean adoptees’ specific descriptors of experience and meaning (Smith, et al., 2009). Following the development of emergent themes, phase four is called, “Searching for connections across emergent themes” (Smith, et al., 2009). I organized and recategorized themes based on their level of importance and pertinence to the participant’s experiences (Smith, et al., 2009).

Moreover, I strategically organized the themes using a multitude of techniques, including: subsumption (the elevation of overarching themes), polarization (contrasts), contextualization (information about setting or context), numeration (frequency), and function (practical impact on the person) (Smith, et al., 2009). Documenting my process along with the inclusion of key words and quotes from the transcripts were important during this step (Smith, et al., 2009). NVivo 12 (2019), offered a sensible and practical way of tracking the sources of the quotes and categorizing the information that contributed to the identification of themes and other memos.

The fifth phase is called, “Moving to the next case” (Smith, et al., 2009). This process entailed applying the steps from the first four phases with another participant transcript (Smith, et al., 2009). During this phase, I integrated bracketing to complete the same process from phases 1-4 to distinguish novel themes and experiences from other participants (Smith, et al., 2009). After the completion of all the within-case reviews and analyses, the sixth phase is called “Looking for patterns across cases.” In this step, I pinpointed and established thematic connections across multiple participants (Pietkiewicz

& Smith, 2014). This included broad “superordinate” themes and subordinate themes that contained specific examples from the individual interviews (Smith, et al., 2009). I modified or eliminated themes based on their relevance, importance, or vividness using the participants’ direct quotes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Referencing and adding comments to the reflexive journal during the thematic development stage was also incredibly helpful when identifying, eliminating, or creating new themes.

Following the conclusion of the data analysis, I completed a narrative that included the rationale and reasoning related to my comprehensive thematic analysis (Smith, et al., 2009). This was inclusive, expansive, and detailed with participant responses as the justification for my reasoning. After completing the discussion section, I wanted to ensure the readers were able to clearly identify the essence of the Korean adoptees’ shared lived experiences from the descriptive information, the interpretative data, and their first hand encounters.

Rigor

There are certain rigorous standards noted for conducting qualitative research. Historically, researchers have attempted to directly tie standards of qualitative research with quantitative methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Strategies have been used to identify and define terms that represent the rigor of qualitative work that are independent of quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For instance, alternative terms to validity, reliability, and objectivity have been noted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or using the metaphor of a crystal to describe change and evolution as an alternative to validity throughout the qualitative research process (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963).

Tracy (2010) proposed eight components that contribute to achieving high quality qualitative research without attempting to formulate a strict universal linear approach. In addition to Tracy (2010), Smith (2010) also developed standards of rigor when using IPA as a methodological approach. Part of the criteria for rigor using IPA will overlap with the general qualitative standards proposed by Tracy (2010), while some guidelines are specific to conducting IPA. Using both criteria, I wanted to enact rigorous and high-quality qualitative research.

The first criterion noted by Tracy (2010) was the worthiness of the topic. Worthiness of a topic is defined as the importance, relevance, or need for greater awareness (Tracy, 2010). Exploring the shared experiences of Korean adoptees was a worthy topic within counseling psychology due to its emphasis on diversity, the novelty using the theory of intersectionality, and increasing awareness for an underrepresented community. For the second measure of excellent criteria, Tracy (2010) noted rigor. I believed that the research procedures and methods that I have selected were relevant, sufficient, and versatile to promote quality within qualitative research. Elements of rigor also included the time, effort, and quality of the data that was collected during the research process (Tracy, 2010).

The third measure of excellent qualitative research noted by Tracy (2010) was the use of sincerity. Within sincerity, Tracy (2010) noted the integration of self-reflexivity and transparency. I utilized reflexivity by bracketing my previous experiences from interfering with the data collection and analysis, while recording pertinent information in my reflexive journal (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In regards to transparency, I displayed an accurate presentation of the information and ensured that other researchers can

critically examine and review any data I have collected (Tracy, 2010; Smith, 2010). The fourth measure of excellent qualitative research is the incorporation of credibility, by using thick description, multivocality, triangulation, and member reflections (Tracy, 2010). I empowered the participants to offer their truthful and subjective experiences in a meaningful way during and after the interviews. Moreover, I utilized their feedback and cross-case analyses to bolster the credibility of the data analysis and description of their shared experiences (Tracy, 2010).

Resonance is the fifth measure of quality qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). Resonance also consists of: aesthetic merit, naturalistic generalization, and transferability (Tracy, 2010). I wanted to disseminate the results and conclusion in a manner that was engaging, creative, and impactful for other clinicians or scholars (Tracy, 2010). The sixth section is called a significant contribution, which can include theoretical, practical, heuristic, and methodological significance (Tracy, 2010). Based on the design and the findings, I am prepared to discuss the significant contributions of this research: deepening previously known information; increasing the openness and motivation to explore future research; establishing a link between the research with practical solutions and clinical application; and by contributing novel study considerations when completing future research (Tracy, 2010).

The next section is ethics, which will be addressed later in the paper. The last guideline noted by Tracy (2010) is meaningful coherence. Meaningful coherence addresses four aspects: meeting the research purpose; achieving the theoretical goal; developing coherent connections between the methods and the conceptual frameworks; and highlighting associations between the literature review, methods, and results. To

achieve meaningful coherence, I established a clear relationship between the rationale, research aims, execution of the methods, and the findings from the research (Smith, 2010). Moreover, I infused transparency with my research procedures and offered direct quotes from the participants to justify my findings and conclusions (Smith, 2010).

Smith (2010) reported that IPA has guidelines for evaluating high quality qualitative research that are independent of the factors listed by Tracy (2010). For instance, IPA research should be gathering appropriate data from the sample of interest stated in the research problem. Moreover, Smith (2010) recommended that I complete idiographic examinations of within-case analyses prior to executing cross-case analyses between participants. I confirmed my findings of the data by completing descriptive and interpretative analyses (Smith, 2010). I focused on information that highlighted the incorporation of context based on the variables of socialization, minority distress, multiple minority identities, and coping (Smith, 2010). I emphasized data that showcased instances of sense making and the Korean adoptees' ability to express meaningful experiences (Smith, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

The previously skipped guiding criterion for excellent qualitative research was ethics (Tracy, 2010). Tracy (2010) described four aspects of ethics that should be considered within qualitative research; they include procedural, situational, relational, and exiting ethics. Procedural ethics are noted by the IRB at each institution and offer objective definitions related to harm, deception, informed consent, and confidentiality (Tracy, 2010). The information in the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) included: facts regarding the qualitative research study, the aims of the research, and how

the research project will be completed (APA, 2002; Groenewald, 2004). Moreover, the APA ethics code (2002) has additional ethical requirements for informed consent; it clearly states voluntary participation and withdrawal, possible risks and benefits, and how the researcher will promise to protect the confidentiality of the participants (APA, 2002). More specifically, I obtained additional verbal permission and consent for audio recording the interviews for data collection purposes (APA, 2002). The participants received compensation from participating in both interviews for their time and willingness to share personal recollections of their experiences (APA, 2002).

I addressed concerns of confidentiality by using pseudonyms and removing other identifying information from this research project (Rossman & Rollis, 2010). Moreover, I was diligent when password protecting documents, technology, or locking physical data that was collected (Rossman & Rollis, 2010). I need to ensure continued confidentiality for my participants following the conclusion of my research due to the possibility of mutual relationships or attending conjoined events. This information enabled the participants to make an informed decision regarding their participation in the research (Kilbourn, 2006).

Situational ethics was defined as the ethical decisions that are utilized by the researcher based on the specific research conditions or contexts (Tracy, 2010). Tracy (2010) recommends incorporating reflection and present moment awareness when attempting to navigate a situational ethical dilemma. Moreover, the use of reasoning and the environmental factors should also guide the actions and decisions chosen when managing spontaneous quandaries (Tracy, 2010). Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to predict every situational risk and benefit with the participants during the research study (Ellis, et

al., 2008). During the process, I made a conscientious effort to attend to the welfare and needs of the participant, while directly addressing any ethical dilemmas with them during the interviews.

Relational ethics are measured by how the researcher demonstrates genuine care and regard for the well-being of the participants (Tracy, 2010). I wanted to demonstrate authenticity, respect, and dignity when developing and maintaining rapport with the participants (Rossman & Rollis, 2010). When there were intensely emotional or distressing feelings, I attempted to comfort the participant and encouraged them to take breaks, however none of the participants sought out the mental health resources (Rossman & Rollis, 2010; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I pursued an environment that was curious, non-judgmental, and patient throughout all of the interviews (Rossman & Rollis, 2010). Generally, I wanted to try and reduce the inherent power differential between the Korean adoptee and me by directly addressing it with them (Rossman & Rollis, 2010). I also empowered the participants to provide direct feedback both to me and referencing their overall research participation experience. I reiterated their voluntary participation and agency when answering any of my prompts or questions (Tracy, 2010).

Exiting ethics is critical to how I presented and utilized the collected data (Tracy, 2010). This included how the interview transcripts were portrayed, represented, or distributed to the readers of the document (Tracy, 2010). Exiting ethics is critically important when including participants from marginalized or minority communities that may be susceptible to being exploited or tokenized based on demographic features

(Tracy, 2010). I pledged that all of the results were representative of the individual and collective experiences of the Korean adoptees in the sample (Tracy, 2010).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The results of this study were primarily composed of the two interviews and the corresponding transcriptions that were collected. Moreover, comments, feedback, and any changes noted by the participants from either of the interviews was also assimilated into the data collection process. Using the transcriptions, there were descriptive and interpretative thematic analyses that were derived from the interviews with each participant (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Moreover, these themes were initially developed within-case and then consequently across-cases to formulate the shared collective experiences of the Korean adoptees. The codes offer a strong representation of the sense making process with Korean adoptees and the meaningful essence of who being a Korean adoptee is. The data analysis portion of the project hoped to address the primary research question of the study, which is what are the shared experiences of Korean adoptees with multiple minority identities over the course of the lifespan?

Themes

After the review of the transcriptions, using within-case and cross-case analyses there were eleven superordinate themes that were noted. Of the eleven superordinate themes, ten of out of the eleven were identified by all eight participants; *Coping with Adoption; Experiences Around Visiting Korea; Identity; Mental Health; Minority Distress; Personal Values; Reactions to Participation; Relationships; Social Support;*

and Strengths, while the eleventh superordinate theme of *Self-Beliefs* was identified in seven of the eight participants. The development and construction of the themes was based on the earlier recommendations noted by Smith, et al., (2009); the themes' prevalence should reflect the validity of the shared experience among the participants. However, as in this sample, Smith, et al., (2009) noted that higher frequencies of themes identified in the participants does not translate to within-group congruity. Some of the themes may be reported by all of the participants, but could be representative of a wide range of responses under the overall superordinate theme. Under each superordinate theme, subordinate themes were also created to provide additional clarity regarding the description and interpretation of the data. For each of the themes, direct quotes from the participants were included to provide clarity and transparency. Please use the Thematic Coding Table (see Appendix I) as a guide when reviewing the themes in the results section.

Coping with Adoption

The superordinate theme of *Coping with Adoption* described how the participants in the sample have generally reacted to their adoption experiences over the course of the lives. The primary subordinate themes are *Adaptive Coping* and *Maladaptive Coping*. Both *Adaptive Coping* and *Maladaptive Coping* subordinate themes contain specific examples that will be described within those respective sections.

Adaptive coping. All eight of the Korean adoptees noted adaptive coping strategies from their interviews. Within the *Adaptive Coping* theme, Korean adoptees noted examples of *Personal Work* along with *Relational Work* that provided positive or helpful ways to interact with their adoption experiences.

Personal work. Abby offered her thoughts:

> I started going to Korean [culture] camp and I went to some of the workshops and they talked about this. These kinds of feelings and I remember feeling so relieved going okay. There is a reason why I felt that, there was a reason why I didn't [share], it was normal for me to feel embarrassed or ashamed; it was not unusual. And then [that's] when I started to feel comfortable talking about it.

Another example was noted by Maggie and her growing relationship with feelings of anger regarding her adoption experiences:

> Being able to feel angry about stuff, which is something I never let myself feel throughout my whole life. Anger was the one emotion that I wasn't allowed to feel, so now I feel like I'm angry all the time at everything but in hopefully productive ways where I take that and do something with it.

Ramona spoke about how she is "In this place of acceptance with [being a Korean adoptee]." Samantha seemed to echo the premise of accepting herself, "And my thing is that I'm adopted. And that I went through all of this good and bad" and "I love who I am and I think that's really important."

In addition to the acceptance of personal experiences and reactions, Brett offered his thoughts regarding the accomplishing of personal needs and goals, "If it's a project that I want to do for myself, then the motivation is self-recharging, I think, and that won't dissipate as quickly as doing things just for the recognition [from others] does." He also used learning photography as a metaphor for what that could look like, "Becoming better [at] photography [and] better at figuring out how you do the things that make me feel better about each day and better about myself." This pursuit of personal wants and needs

seemed to resonate with Parker, “I've never been one to just sit around and wait for things to happen; just like wish upon a star for all these things to rain down. It's like, no if these are the things that you want. And you know what, you need to figure out a way to go get them.”

William shared how the use of “meditation” offers him a mechanism for processing information that is important to him:

> When I’m in the car it's almost a form of meditation, but a lot of self-reflection and really understanding why I make decisions, the way [I] do and what led me to make decisions and what is leading me to do things in certain ways. I feel like the more I can understand that the better the vision that I will make moving forward.

From the Korean adoptees, coping with their adoption experiences included the use of self-acceptance along with acknowledging emotional reactions. For Abby and Maggie, the identification and normalization of affective responses regarding their adoption seemed associated with personal comfort. Also, Samantha and Ramona provided responses that aligned with accepting themselves, even when Samantha eluded to positive and negative encounters. Other participants included ways in which they recharged their batteries; whether it was reflecting for William, learning hobbies for Brett, or accomplishing personal goals for Parker. The individuals demonstrated awareness into what self-care activities were beneficial and also what worked for them. The Korean adoptees appeared to be resourceful. They were willing to incorporate habits and activities that aided them when they were confronted with day-to-day obstacles. In addition, the Korean adoptees also seemed to benefit from the identification and normalization of emotional needs and reactions.

Particularly when interacting with painful or difficult emotions, the efficacy to still be curious and accepting could be protective against self-destructive beliefs or behaviors regarding their adoption.

Relational work. Another adaptive way the Korean adoptees coped with their adoption histories was through interpersonal interactions. Mike noted the helpfulness of other people:

> I needed to allow people into my life and give them the trust [to] build relationships…give them a chance to even be a part of my life, instead of being suspicious or negative about what they're trying to [do]…I had to really open up. Because...I don't think I would have made it. If I would have kept it [just] to myself

Two other participants also shared their willingness to seek out relationships. Ramona said, "I don't have to be super this or super that or Korean or White, I can just be me. So, I've always kind of gravitated towards having a bunch of different friends from racial and [different] cultural backgrounds." Samantha added, "I tried to just meet with other people who maybe went through something like adoption and being South Korean and really, try to talk and relate to people who have the same experience as me."

Another aspect that was highlighted among this sample was the importance of communicating with others. For Abby, "I think being truthful with people. I'm putting out there what I want back. If I'm completely honest with everyone and truthful, then that's what I will get back, you know, and if I know I can trust somebody being honest with me that feels. I feel safe. I feel secure." William was also willing to share about himself in a group setting:

> We were asked to do an exercise of...reading [and writing] about ourselves and our identity in the form of I am from so...I'm in that form. Well, I get into this group and I have six middle-aged White women with me and everybody's going around [and] everybody's crying. I do mine [and] everybody's crying. So, I'm like at this raw vulnerable point.

Samantha seemed to insinuate how important communicating her experiences can be, "I want people to know about what it's like [to be a Korean adoptee]. So maybe people like [my adoptive brother] when they're older would feel more comfortable talking about what it's like to be adopted and different things like that."

Although some more explicit than others, the Korean adoptees who formed relationships with others presented a possible mechanism for coping with their adoption experiences. As noted by Mike, it might not be something that occurs naturally at first, but can be grown and developed over time. Ramona reported the importance of feeling comfortable to express her most authentic self, while Samantha shared the value of meeting other people who were able to relate and share common experiences. Along with creating and growing connections with others, Korean adoptees expressed the importance of communication. William and Samantha provided examples for how communicating about difficult moments or overall experiences can be important tools when disclosing their reflections; in a listening or speaking role. Forming close and genuine connections may be predicated on the ability to express the impact of adoption. For Korean adoptees their interpersonal relationships can solidify critical resources and social support. These bonds may serve to empower the voices and experiences of Korean adoptees, while also protecting them from feeling isolated or weary during overwhelming

circumstances. The Korean adoptees' ability to share vulnerable moments not only allows for others to understand or empathize, but can create opportunities to build genuine connections.

Neutral or maladaptive coping. All eight of the participants also endorsed the utilization of neutral or maladaptive coping mechanisms related to being a Korean adoptee. Within the *Neutral or Maladaptive Coping* theme, the Korean adoptees noted examples of coping with: *Abandonment*; *Cognitive Tools*; *Difficulties Processing Emotion*; *Feeling Alone or Isolated*; *Impact of the Perception of Others*; *Insecurity and Difficulties with Trust*; *Perfectionism*; *Protecting Self and Others*; and *Searching for Answers*.

Abandonment. Abby shared a story about her fears of being abandoned by her husband, "So he was going somewhere and I was like, okay, so you'd be [back] in an hour, right? And three hours later, he wasn't home and I panicked. I thought he was dead on the side of the road, and that was definitely early in our relationship, I had concerns about him leaving me." Abby believed her fears of abandonment initially started as a child, "Well I couldn't control the one thing that started my life, which was being with my birth mother…it's shaped everything. I remember being really young as a child. I'm thinking well, if she could give me away [others could too]." Brett also noted concerns with fears of abandonment within his romantic relationships, "Yeah, I think it's just a real fear of abandonment, real hard to trust that the other person won't disappear. Leave me or just disappear and just the huge fear which I'm guessing probably comes from being abandoned." These fears seemed to impact the ability for Korean adoptees to form meaningful and strong bonds with other people, Maggie mentioned:

> Having friends and being social but not really wanting to risk having meaningful friendships or meaningful relationships because I was always afraid. Certainly, had a lot of abandonment issues that I had to grapple with throughout my life, which contributed a lot to having a lot of surface friends, but no one that I truly, truly bonded with like, super closely, or let myself be vulnerable around.

Ramona suggested that, “I've still had the same abandonment [issues] and same suffering that I think every adoptee has of being given up and feeling like they're not loved.”

There is such a strong and powerful message regarding the abandonment concerns noted by the participants. Whether they referred to someone disappearing or even permanently leaving through death, Abby and Brett demonstrated its palpability. There seemed to be a direct line drawn that connected the abandonment of birth parents and the internal fear of other people vanishing as if they were a ghost. It didn’t matter if those vanishing acts actually occurred, but the Korean adoptees demonstrated their intense fear about its possibility. Feeling scared of these potential outcomes may stymie Maggie’s ability to form reliable connections or fulfill Ramona’s search to feel loved and cared for. The vanishing or disappearance of birth parents, particularly birth mothers continued to influence the interpersonal decisions made by Korean adoptees when creating, growing, maintaining, or even losing relationships in adulthood.

Cognitive tools. The Korean adoptee participants also shared cognitive tools they used to cope with their adoption. Brett suggested, “I think even a drawback saying [you] have been adopted can be outweighed by other factors like, if you happen to be rich or really good at something, good at dancing, or playing piano.” To cope with

overwhelming emotions, Mike noticed that, “[When] I was younger, that I had feelings, whether it be anger, sadness, depression, anything like that, but I didn't know why I felt the way I did.” These similar strategies appeared to occur when the Korean adoptees in the sample attempted to make sense of their adoption narratives. Samantha talked about her meaning making process regarding her birth mother:

> I think about that a lot...how [my birth mother] made a decision to give me the best life that I could have. And so that's really helped me become like a better person to is that I know that my [birth] mom, like after growing up and realizing this situation was a hard decision for her to make and she just wanted what's best for me. And I now feel like I should do my best to become the best person that I can be…a lot of birth moms when they send their kid up for adoption, they still think about it. And I know that's a big thing...The [birth] moms still feel bad about it and it's a hard situation.

This sentiment seemed to be shared by William when referring to his birth mother, “I'm from a mother who could not keep me who sent me an ocean away to have opportunity to have a good life.”

Mike appeared to incorporate cognitive tools when faced with emotions, there was a movement toward answering the question of why they occurred. While, Brett seemed to introduce the notion of using pros and cons to add up characteristics or qualities that outweighed emotional experiences. These seemed to repeat when William and Samantha reflected on their adoption process and guessing on what their birth mother was thinking when they gave them up. It was interesting to observe the frankness and tendency to move away from emotion when the adoptees retold their story about being

adopted or how their birth mothers may have felt. These statements were produced despite the fact that William and Samantha had never met their birth family. They both seemed convinced about why they were given up for adoption. These cognitive tools possibly served as an important mechanism for controlling or managing emotion, while simultaneously shaping their meaning making process.

Difficulties processing emotion. Abby shared during her interview, “I don't think I've ever been allowed to grieve…and I haven't had permission to be sad. I haven't had permission to say like, well, this kind of sucked,” when referring to her adoption. Starting in his childhood, Mike noticed his emotions, “I didn't know what to do with [those feelings] a lot of the times. And I didn't know how to feel. And I think a lot of the times it was just channeled in kind of destructive ways; destructive patterns and it wasn't always outwardly destructive either it was more inward. I just held in a lot.” Not only did this seem to occur with regulating emotion, but this seemed to occur when interacting with feelings in a safe way. Ramona said, “Something I've wanted to do is really tap into my emotion. As an adoptee now and as an adult and [to] really find some good material to write adult music and emotional music and anything that really comes from my heart, but I have struggled with it.” Another Korean adoptee, Brett noted that his inability to be aware of his emotions can occur in social interactions, “I project my own feelings into what I see. I'm aware of [it] because there are times when I see somebody doing something and it looks like they're expressing something [and] I talk to them afterwards and they're not...they [are] doing something completely [different].”

For Abby and Mike there seemed to be confusion about how to acknowledge and develop a healthy relationship with their emotions. For Abby it seemed like she never gave herself permission to feel or experience them, while for Mike his emotions seemed to almost be locked and never let out. Ramona described the challenges of finding her emotions, almost as if they have been lost or impossible to rediscover. For Brett, the unfamiliarity with what emotions looked like appeared to also impact his ability to navigate social interactions without imposing his affective experience onto others. The participants provided examples of how a distant or absent connection with affective experiences can occur intra and interpersonally. In some cases, it appeared that emotional attunement or other coping strategies with affect were never unlocked or attended to starting in childhood thru adulthood. The broken relationship with emotion may have also contributed to locking or stuffing emotion away due to estrangement or discomfort. Whether it is conscious or unconscious, the locking, stuffing, or projecting of emotion seemed to be a direct result of a broken or unprocessed symbiosis with feelings.

Feeling alone or isolated. Reflecting after a session at a Korean culture camp, Abby described, "Going ahead to Korean camp today in the workshops. I know a lot of challenges for [adoptive] parents…I remember that being a kid of a pair of [non-adoptive parents], you know, being a Korean adoptee and thinking my parents just don't get it." Maggie noted at times feeling alone, "Which is what it felt like most of the time where I had no idea of who I was, or what, like where to put myself. I'm never really feeling like I totally fit in." This sentiment seemed to be shared by Mike, "I think a lot of that was adoption and that was shaped by my perspective because I struggled again and again just

attaching myself to one group or another." He continued by saying, "I didn't really know how to cope with any of [the adoption issues] and I didn't even know who to get support [from and how to] get the support for it." William described feeling a lack of support when communicating about the impact of his adoption, "I would go to therapy, but there isn't a Korean adoptee therapist...I need to talk to somebody that can understand what it's like to be in my shoes and where I live. There's not a lot of people that actually have been in my shoes or can understand my shoes and how I feel."

For Abby, Maggie, and Mike, there is a resounding feeling of being alone and isolated. The feeling of not fitting in or not being understood seemed to come across starting as children and was very salient growing up. Mike and William spoke about their difficulties with forming bonds with people that could facilitate support. This seemed to either take place in not feeling empowered to seeking help or feeling as though no one could actually relate and genuinely understand their experience. There appeared to be a common thread that confronting and facing adoption can be an isolating experience. Regardless of the different types, sizes, or colors of shoes, the participants struggled to find others who could understand or relate to their experiences. The process of trying multiple types and pairs of sneakers seemed to only remind them of how alone they were. This belief that they were isolated could have inhibited their willingness to try and reach out so that their shoes could be seen or worn by others. The participants highlighted encounters where they felt unsupported, unseen, and faced difficulties with help-seeking behaviors. It seems possible that these interactions reinforced the belief that they are and would continue to be on their own.

Impact of the perception of others. Brett spoke about how others' perceptions could directly relate to his behaviors or decision making, "I've always really reacted to praise or recognition from other people really quite strongly. It's a little bit scary. I feel like I can't quite exactly trust life things in that regard. Am I doing something for praise or am I doing it for myself?" In a slightly different way, Maggie noted, "I think as an adoptee you want that validation of being either attractive or being worthy in some way, whatever the measurement used is." Parker also seemed to question his own intentions with making personal decisions, "What or who are you trying to prove this to, are you trying to prove this to yourself?"

For Brett, Maggie, and Parker they provided examples of how they were impacted by the perceived thoughts and reactions from others. For Brett and Maggie, they seemed to pursue actions or behaviors where they would receive validation or recognition by others. For Parker, this process appeared to reveal his own personal questioning about the intentionality behind his decision-making. For these and other adoptees in the sample, there was at least a questioning and sometimes deliberate decision to match others' expectations, evaluations, or perceptions. External people, objects, or symbols held a strong influence over how these Korean adoptees felt and saw themselves. This effect suggested that Korean adoptees may be vulnerable to the perception of others, particularly if they are receiving some acknowledgement or praise. For Korean adoptees, this process illustrated the additional weight bound to the impression of others, even to the point of sacrificing aspects of themselves.

Insecurity and difficulties with trust. Abby described:

> I don't trust easily. I'm always kind of suspicious of people's motives…if they're nice to me or they say something. I'm like, okay, well, there's got to be an underlying motive, [it is] very challenging for me to take somebody or [their] kindness or anything [like] that [at] face value. It's just too hard for me to take anything at face value. I always feel like there's got to be something underneath it.

Brett made it very clear regarding his insecurities, "those insecurities [in relationships], they are really really big, the biggest challenge." Abby also linked difficulties with trusting others to ceding control, "I'm not good at spontaneity and I don't like allowing somebody else to be in control…you know, from planning trips to what we're having for dinner…it's very hard for me to let go. And I've had to really work on it"

Not only can insecurity in relationships be related to trusting others with responsibility, but for William, "I don't have a lot of really deep relationships with people. I don't know if that's actually an issue that I have or not (laughs)...Being acquainted with somebody is important to me. But like a deep relationship is not something that I spend a lot of energy on and I don't know why. It's like I don't prioritize deep, deep relationships." Some of these personal insecurities are independent of being in relationships. Parker shared, "I think that there were opportunities, that I wish I would have taken sometimes in my life. I don't think that I did just because I was a little scared of what the outcomes were going to be."

Mike spoke about insecurities within the context of attractiveness, “I had a lot of hatred for women especially Asian women because of that. Because I felt like it was a rejection and it was denying my masculinity and that was extremely hard for me to just kind of accept that.”

For Abby and Brett, personal insecurities seemed to create difficulties when interacting with others; this was potentially related to a lack of control or self-confidence in social settings. For William, the barriers to developing trust with others may have repeated interpersonal patterns where there was lack of depth or meaning within relationships. Insecurity can also take place intrapersonally. For Parker, self-doubt appeared to be a strong factor for sacrificing certain decisions or choices; while Mike noted insecurities related to his attractiveness that lead to feelings of rejection or anger. Within relational contexts with other people, personal insecurities may hinder Korean adoptees’ ability to form genuine and strong relationships. These behavioral choices within relational patterns may have reinforced that building trusting and safe relationships were impossible, while the underlying anxiety potentially undermined the strength of the bond. The absence of trust can occur individually for the Korean adoptee, or be identified within the context of the dyad. Other aspects of personal insecurity may be internalized by the individual. The self-evaluation formed from a lack of self-trust could ultimately restrict the person’s self-efficacy, self-love, and perceived value. However, if insecurities are identified and explored, the adoptee could strengthen those aforementioned aspects of self and support choices that are aligned with their personal values and needs.

Perfectionism. Abby described her own standards, “I'm just always consistently in a state of…I gotta be perfect. I have to be the perfect mom. The perfect wife. The perfect employee, the perfect friend.” She shared an example of when she made a mistake, “[I] dropped the ball. I feel instead of just going okay well you messed up…I take it to the extreme like oh my gosh I failed and I beat myself up.” Maggie also described perfectionistic tendencies starting as a child, “I lived most of my childhood as that perfect student and perfect child and perfect daughter, because I was so afraid of being given back again, or disappointing someone and them leaving or them saying, you know, you're not worth it.” She goes on, “So I put immense pressure on myself to be perfect all the time in every aspect of my life. And when I couldn’t be, it was catastrophic.” Samantha expressed similar reactions that started as a child, “As a kid I always had the thought…if I'm the best at something my [adoptive] parents will love me and stuff like that.” She described the source of her work ethic, “The goal setting and stuff like that really branched from me wanting to be the best and impress [my adoptive parents] and overall just show them...that I'm worthy of their love.”

For Abby, the development and recurrent pattern of perfectionistic thoughts and beliefs seemed to permeate her childhood throughout her adulthood in multiple roles. Abby and Samantha also connected their beliefs about being the best or perfect to ensuring that they were worth the love and attention of their adoptive parents. Based on both participants, the aims and goals of seeking perfectionistic standards appeared to be a coping strategy to deal with the worry and terror of potentially being relinquished again, but this time by their new adoptive parents. Whether they were just tendencies or actual personality traits, perfectionism could begin in young Korean adoptees. The underlying

properties related to these inflexible beliefs may reflect the conditionality to which some Korean adoptees may relate with their new adoptive parents; this appeared particularly salient if the person had difficulties seeing themselves as worthy of being cared for. For both Abby and Samantha, these standards were recreated in other relationships and roles moving into adulthood.

Protecting self and others. Abby shared an example of how this can create a pattern with others, “You want people to understand [the struggle but] then [its] painful sometimes to talk about it [referring to her adoption] ...So then you walk away. Well, they don't really get it. I didn't really [want to] explain it so [it’s] not really their fault, but I don't know [what to do], so it’s that vicious circle.” Looking more broadly, Maggie noted her observations within relationships:

> I think, [it] opened me up to very unhealthy relationships with people. Because I so wanted to please people and be accepted because I experienced such intense feelings of isolation and not fitting in, and being excluded, that I think I was far too forgiving and far too. Just kind of willing to overlook every negative thing that anyone ever did, even though it really shouldn't have been overlooked.

Brett also shared:

> I'm not as brave as other people but when other people [start] revealing that they're feeling like they're lives [are] fucked up or screwed up. Then oh okay, [I feel] it's safe to talk about [things], I can let my guard down. So, I think maybe a lot of it has to do with that.

So, if we're having a conversation about how difficult some things were in our past [and if they were] related [or] maybe [not] related with [being] Korean adoptees, if the other person revealed something about himself...I began to feel safe [with them].

When there isn't a willingness to confront other people, Mike said, "I think that's where the worldview comes from is just by listening to other people. It's like by listening to all those people. I kind of assume who they are and that I can kind of live vicariously through them, even if I don't understand completely." This may also be evident when foreclosing on the ability to look at yourself, as Parker noted:

> I remember having a long conversation with one of my professors after class one day and she was like…I understand what you're trying to get through with your [art]work. But I think that you need to have a more personal meaning behind it. If you explore more about the part that you are not talking about and. Figure out how you can integrate that into your artwork, then it'll make you a little bit more secure of a person when you talk about your artwork instead of leaving out parts of it.

This did not seem isolated to just Parker, William also pointed out:

> One of the biggest realizations that I've had over the past year is that I have suppressed a lot of my feelings about being a Korean adoptee and living where I live. And it kind of opened up a Pandora's box of things for me to deal with from dealing with my biological family, my birth mother and a lot of these underlying things that I have never really addressed because they were never really a priority of mine.

For Abby and Maggie, choosing to not reveal their true feelings in relationships provided protection against sharing how they feel about others. Brett and Mike also detailed a similar strategy, both men seemed to utilize the role of listener which contributed to reducing the opportunity to reveal information about themselves with others. When reading these experiences shared by the participants, the common thread seemed to be passivity when interacting with other people. The choices were enacted to protect self from others, but also to protect self from knowing self. Even through the medium of art, Parker seemed to struggle with being open and reveal his most authentic self. More explicitly, William noted how the conscious or unconscious suppression of feelings, thoughts, or actions left him feeling even more vulnerable about his experience as a Korean adoptee. These choices represented steps taken to avoid an unsightly image or be confronted with something unpredictable from Pandora's Box. Moreover, attempts to suppress experiences as a Korean adoptee also appeared as a strategy to protect themselves and others from their own experiences. For both choices, the potential unintended consequences could include; for instance: feelings of isolation, barriers to feeling safe with self or others, difficulties with processing and making meaning of experiences, or developing inauthentic intrapersonal or interpersonal bonds. The willingness to protect themselves from self and others could represent the motivation to avoid distress prompted by personal or relational contexts.

Searching for answers. Maggie noted, "I definitely feel like I'm figuring out a place for myself in the world and that I don't have to apologize for existing and for being here. Which is a pretty big contrast to how I felt like most of my life." Mike used the analogy of a puzzle when describing his journey, "I think before [traveling to Korea] I

always knew there was something a little off about me and my story and everything. I almost felt like there were puzzle pieces and they're kind of scattered and they're just kind of all out there…there's some sort of picture, but you don't really know what goes where and why." William's comment seemed to capture the puzzle finding mission, "It's just part of the story, though, there's a lot to the adoptee part of it. There's a lot of depth to that particularly being [a] Korean adoptee."

Brett offered his opinion regarding the process of personal learning, "I'm learning actually. I think I support myself by observing, just by observing myself." Sometimes, it takes the facilitation of others to be exposed to new information, "[The Korean restaurant owner] made that a completely safe environment for me to try new foods and figure out what I didn't like and figure out what I did like without any kind of judgment or making me feel bad or anything," Maggie said. Parker shared his sense of curiosity when learning about others, "When I do see, like groups of Asians there's not that sense of, do I fit in with them? It's more like okay, cool. There's like Asians here. What are they doing, what are they working on?" William described an active component of learning and where he is on that spectrum, "I've already started exploring. So, there are [Korean adoptee] people that have explored…and people that haven't even started exploring [Korean culture] or just starting to explore. I'm somewhere along this journey in the middle and I sometimes feel more disconnected on either end of that."

For Maggie and Mike, they identified their own journeys and processes, who they were, and how it related to the world around them. William seemed to emphasize the difficulty and complexity of finding clarity on his own path. Parker, William, and Maggie noted examples of being curious and learning aspects related to Korean people

and culture. Brett recounted how he seemed to learn through personal exploration and self-reflection. Using the process of putting a puzzle together, these Korean adoptees reflected on how finding the placement of certain puzzle pieces suggests an ongoing process. Also, the intricacy and dynamic nature of being a person creates a wide variation of pieces and differing levels of clarity about what each piece means. The process of growing and exploring new information also aligned with the search for answers; this may include their personal identity, Korean culture, or even other groups of people. The choice to seek understanding was represented through looking toward self and outwards toward other people and culture. The assimilation of new information and the consolidation of self appeared aligned with a normative personal development pathway.

Experiences Around Visiting Korea

The superordinate theme of *Experiences Around Visiting Korea* explored the experiences of Korean adoptees before, during, and after their visit to South Korea. The primary subordinate themes were described as *Before Going to Korea*; *Reactions to Being in Korea*; *Reactions to Leaving Korea*; and *Reactions After Returning to the US*.

Before going to Korea. All eight of the Korean adoptees noted reactions prior to visiting Korea from their interviews. Maggie shared, “I was mostly intimidated by, like, I don't know, what do I do when I get there [to Korea]? I don't know enough Korean. I don't know where to go, I don't know anything.” Her fears started several months before her trip:

> I applied, and I got it [to be a member on a group Korean adult adoptee trip]. And I remember I got the notification at the end of January, beginning of February of that year, and I just cried. I just sat down on the floor, and I cried because I was so happy, but also really scared. And then I spent the next six months trying to not talk myself out of doing it because I was so terrified of all of it.

There was also some trepidation noted by Ramona on her most recent trip to Korea:

> This didn't happen to me until very recently, like the trip in the fall of last year [2018] ...And then when I got on the plane going there in LA. There was...maybe two American people and that was it. It was weird it's like the first time I actually felt kind of uncomfortable...it's weird because normally I don't feel that way around Korean Koreans, but then this time I did feel uncomfortable. Like, why aren't there more Americans on this plane?

William also noted some anxiety about leaving for his trip to Korea, but for reasons related to his adoptive family, "I felt guilty because…[I was] walking away from [my adoptive father and step mom] because I didn't know if they felt like they were losing me because I could go there [to Korea] and find my birth mom and now that's my mom. That's my family...So I had this...guilt."

Brett noticed, "The first trip [I went back to Korea I was] hoping to find information about my past." Ramona also shared a similar sentiment to Brett, "I would say that [meeting my birth family] also contributed to a lot of going to Korea for me." William remembered, "I got to the top of the escalator. And I was like, whoa, hey, we're doing this and you know went and was waiting for my plane and I was excited to get on

the plane because as soon as I got on the plane, it was...The adventure begins. I get to be Korean and every minute that path until I landed there, I was getting that much closer to being Korean."

Maggie and William reported worry about leaving for their trip to Korea, with questions about how it may impact them. Ramona remembered some discomfort when being on the flight to Korea and being surrounded by a lot of native Koreans on the plane. Brett, William, and Ramona also offered their main motivations for choosing to return to their birth country; connection with birth family, birth search, or just identity exploration. The trip back to Korea seemed to cultivate a spectrum of different reactions and motivations among the Korean adoptees. The symbolism of the trip seemed to hold personal meaning for each person that chose to return. Honoring the spectrum of reactions, feelings, and goals for visiting Korea was extremely important within this section. Despite all having the same of experience of traveling back to Korea at least once, the reactions were extremely different. The personal acknowledgement of this inherent difference also dispels the notion that Korean adoptees choosing to visit their birth country have a universal need or pull toward it.

Reactions to being in Korea. All eight of the Korean adoptees noted reactions when they were in Korea. Within the *Reactions to Being in Korea* theme, the primary subordinate themes that represented their experiences were: *Familiarity*, *Impactful*, *Overwhelming*, and *Stimulating*. Those will be described in greater detail within this section.

Familiarity. Both ends of the spectrum of *Familiarity* will be noted within this section. Brett reported generally, “Yeah…It felt like they were my people, you know that I belonged there [in Korea].” Parker similarly to Brett, said, “I think just having this feeling of familiarity of, okay...These are the people that look like you...just that feeling of this is where you came from, these are your people. I think I felt pretty good just being able to see them all. Just be able to see such a dense population of them was like, oh my God!” Ramona shared:

> I had just gotten off the plane...I love the Korean air. I don't know what it is when you get off the plane. It's really humid and it just tastes salty. I don't know how to explain it...It was really warm...and something about the air…When you're a child or when you're a newborn, you have these certain memories in your head…I don't really remember it. [But it does seem familiar] when I was a kid, the humidity and just the way Korea is.

Samantha very vividly described her reaction during her first trip in Korea, “I went and got something to drink, and it's just I sat. I remember sitting down, like the first time I ever got to Korea. I remember sitting down and just crying because it felt so familiar to me.” She continued to describe through analogy, “It's [also] just happiness and excitement and also it feels like you're talking to a person you've known since kindergarten like everything at once and it was just beautiful and overwhelming.”

After reading the quotes from the participants, there seemed to be a feeling of familiarity that was brought up when experiencing Korea; through the air, ambience, or the physical resemblance of people. When describing her experience, Samantha noted the feeling as if she was meeting up and speaking to someone they had known for a long

time. Parker and Brett also noted a sense of belonging among the Korean people and Ramona spoke about reminders in the weather that seemed to place her back around the time she was born there. Redeveloping a relationship with a place where you spent such little time was remarkable, particularly when the participants identified such a sense of familiarity. The word familiarity suggested that the formation of a bond had previously occurred and was powerful enough to be remembered when the Korean adoptees returned. For some adoptees, there was a natural and organic reconnection with something that had been absent for such a long time. The extended and strong connection meant that some of the adoptees were able to reconnect to their birth country as if the gap only existed temporarily, despite the severed connection culturally, linguistically, and biologically.

On the contrary, some of the participants also observed how Korea was extremely foreign or unfamiliar. Abby noted, "I felt like an outsider in a place that you know [I] look like everybody…everyone looks like you, but you feel like the one that doesn't belong. I felt like that was me." This seemed evident when Abby told a story about her search for a hamburger:

> We [My sister and I] talked about it, we weren't really into Korean food. Neither one of us spoke the language when we were there. We both about the same time I remember were both craving a hamburger…I think we ended up at Incheon, Hard Rock Cafe or something [where] we knew we could get a hamburger. And we were just laughing we're joking about like, oh my gosh, we're so pathetic.

In a slightly different way, Maggie noted contrasting cultural norms related to physical appearance, "As an outsider who went to Korea and [I] certainly felt those [physical] differences and felt different because of my physical makeup or because of the clothing sizes." She noted there was an ideal image that "especially women are supposed to achieve in Korea." While others did feel like an outsider in Korea, Parker remarked it was, "A bombardment of just having all these different smells, different sites, hearing different voices, [and] seeing different things in print…It was all Korean [letters] this is crazy."

The experience of Korea feeling unfamiliar, different, and even isolating was noted by the participants in the study. Abby reportedly felt like an outsider and seemed to judge herself for not wanting to have Korean food on one of her visits. For Parker and Maggie, they appeared to observe and acknowledge that there were differences in different sensory experiences and clothing sizes respectively. The contrast related to language, culture, or food choices highlighted how Korea provided divergent norms from growing up in the United States. The lack of familiarity with the Korean way of life illuminated a myriad of reactions. The distinct cultural, language, and other norms noted by the participants may also highlight potential barriers to feeling comfortable when Korean adoptees travel back to Korea.

Impactful. Abby described her reaction as she was landing in Korea, "I believe it was daytime and I just remember looking out the window and going holy crap this was where I was born…I'm touching down. This is where my life started and that was extremely weird." In Korea, Brett also noted this sense of personal origin, "I was thinking very specifically, oh this is where my body came from, this country and if I'd

die it would be nice to be buried up here [while] overlooking my country." William noted a specific moment that stood out to him, "And then I saw all the [Korean] people walking on the street and I was like oh my God. I remember sitting down on the curb and just [taking a] deep breath because it was in that moment, I realized that I arrived in a place where everyone looks like me."

Other Korean adoptees seemed to be impacted when exploring their personal past. Samantha shared about her experience when visiting her birth city:

> And so one of the days on my first trip there I got to go there [to Pyeongtaek, my birthplace] and just walk around for a day and see what it would have been like if I would have lived there. It was a hugely emotional day of just seeing where I would have been growing up and where I would have went to school and different things like that. And that's the most memorable part because I got a small glimpse of maybe what my life would have looked like if I hadn't been adopted.

Mike noted his reaction to accompanying his adoptive sister when she was seeking information about her birth search:

> I would just say the defining moment for me in that trip [was when] we actually went to the orphanage [where my adoptive sister was] ...They brought her [adoption] file [out]…I just remember that there was just so much weight in that situation. Because it's so many emotions going on right there because…She didn't even know she had a father and what her [birth] father looked like… [She learned] her mother was basically raped when she was 16...I just remember seeing her.

> She completely just broke down and cried and there's a table and we're all around there, but I felt extremely helpless there. And that was just incredibly painful and difficult for both of us. And I'll never forget that moment.

Maggie noted that hearing the experiences of the birth mothers was particularly moving for her, "The birth mother talk during the trip was like, I still don't even have a word for it. It was just probably the most emotionally impactful moment that I had on the whole trip." She continued, "Talking to the birth mothers and hearing their pain and...the fact that they do remember, and they do think about it, and they do know how old their child is. Even if they don't talk about it to their family or to their friends."

Abby and Brett shared moments on their trip to Korea regarding the impact of visiting their birth country. William recalled an impactful moment when he was on a street and surrounded by so many Koreans and recalled taking a deep breath and acknowledging that all of the people looked similarly to him. For Samantha, she noted and imagined what her life would have looked like if she had not been adopted as she walked around her birth city. On one of his trips to Korea, Mike accompanied his adoptive sister back to the orphanage where she was born and remembered feeling helpless and in pain as she learned about her birth mother and father. For Maggie, the memory of listening to birth mothers who had given up their children for adoption stood out to her and she seemed to take some solace knowing that they still remembered those babies who had been given up many years prior. The variety of encounters that were reportedly impactful was notable within this section. All of these moments occurred simply by each Korean adoptee returning to where they were born many years after their adoption. The feelings seemed to be very present for all of the adoptees when they were

sharing their stories; some included pain, astonishment, and comfort. It also appeared natural when the adoptees were back in Korea to imagine or picture themselves in lives that could have been. Returning to Korea presented those opportunities for Korean adoptees to actively engage in those possibilities.

Overwhelming. Abby shared her unique experience with going to Korea for the first time:

> That was challenging in that first trip. Definitely because the focus was very much around our son, you know, [I] was kind of able to put all that and compartmentalize it over here [referring to her own reaction to being in Korea], okay, that's all about, like, I'm about to become a mom. I wanted to bond with my son. And, you know, it was very easy for me to just put all the focus on that (being a mother) and just not think or worry or deal with [my reactions] on that trip… I kind of didn't really deal with any of [my] feelings...I think I just kind of wanted to avoid the whole thing [and] just focus on my son.

Samantha also shared her experience when visiting the hospital where she was born:

> We went to the hospital I was born in. And I got there and I couldn't talk [it was] just overwhelming and everything was running through my head like a million miles per hour of like I was here, this is [the] same place. I actually was before, like this is probably the last place I saw my [birth] mom when I was being transported and it's just this overwhelming amount of emotion.

William shared his experience with attempting to try and find his friend in the airport the day he initially landed in Korea:

> And we're trying to find my friend. And I'm like, oh my God, we didn't have a phone to [use]...we need to call him, but then [we think] oh well let's buy a phone card. We try and buy a phone card; the person doesn't speak English. So, we're trying to write him. Finally, we get a phone card, then we had to figure out how to activate the phone card so we could place a call, [we're] trying to read the Korean and we call and it's all in Korean. So, it's like, whoa, oh my God…Finally, by freaking chance. We just ran into my friend. He's like standing there looking around in like [a] sea of people…so we get [to] him...we get in the car and he's like, okay, we're going to go eat. So, then we went and ate and then we went back to his parents' house and slept pretty hard, had jetlag it's tough.

Abby spoke about how she had to contend with the reaction of being in Korea herself for the first time, while going through the process of meeting her first adopted child from Korea. Samantha noted feeling overwhelmed when she visited where she was born and thought about the magnitude of this possibly being the last place she had contact with her birth mother. William spoke about feeling disoriented and confused when he attempted to contact his friend in the busy airport after landing in Korea. The participants again revealed a diverse range of feeling overwhelmed when they visited Korea, it was revealed physically, emotionally, and psychologically. The source of this exhaustion could stem from the physical exhaustion from flying many hours and changing many time zones; facing the prospect of knowing where you were born; or visiting your birth country for the first time and adopting a child from Korea, the intensity is high. The

physical, emotional, and psychological toll of visiting Korea may be overwhelming and unabating. The reactions noted by the participants provided only a glimpse of the challenges to processing, increasing awareness, and making meaning Korean adoptees in Korea.

Stimulating. Maggie described being around Korean people and culture:

> Just being surrounded by Korean people and [being in] the place that is Korea. But it was starting to kind of hit me a little bit. Just from being able to hear it and not understand anything anyone was saying, to like, the food is just here, and it's so cheap, and it's so good. I don't have to drive like, a crazy amount of distance or pay an exorbitant amount of money to eat Korean food now. It's just here.

William also remarked on the liveliness of the Korean people at the airport when he arrived:

> And then we got to... [where you] got through customs, picked up our baggage and we walked into where our friend was picking [us] up from. It was like all Korean people. Oh my god! It was like this wave of Korea. Korea hit me and I'm like, oh haha like trying to talk to people. I can't talk to anybody, people are running around in the airport, but there was a billion Koreans running around.

Ramona shared about her notable arrival in 2018:

> Last September [2018 in Korea] that was the coolest arrival, because [my birth mother] picked me up from the airport...So to have her literally standing there was just, it was just unreal. And also, her husband, who I had never met...It was really emotional for me…that was a really amazing arrival…And I just remember just walking down the gate area. It was five o'clock pm in Korea and I went to

customs and I just texted, or Kakao talked my birth mom that I was there and the Korean airport has free Wi Fi, which is awesome (Laughs)...[I was] able to message them and then I went to customs and then I was just wearing, like a hoodie...I was wearing a blue hoodie and just looked like crap. [I] hadn't really slept, but I felt really alive though and just really happy to be there.

For Maggie and William, being confronted by different elements of the Korean culture or people seemed to be a surprise and unavoidable. Despite not sleeping well, Ramona seemed to share how alive she felt when walking out of the airport to meet her birth mother and her husband. For these adoptees, there seemed to be the common themes of excitement and amazement that hit them through emotional and physical waves from the culture and the people. These waves may be even greater due to the novelty of visiting along with the absence of the exposure due to the disconnect of living with White parents in the United States. These moments and experiences seemed to reflect an engaging place. The waves could represent the lively and enriching environment of Korea and provide the opportunity for Korean adoptees to experience potential growth, development, and the integration of new experiences.

Reactions to leaving Korea. All eight of the Korean adoptees noted reactions when they were in the process of leaving Korea. Abby shared, “Relief, really like, okay, I'm done. I'm done...I’ve eaten my broccoli. I’ve done my thing. Well and I get to go home (Laughs), yeah sad.”

She goes on and elaborated, “It was just kind of a relief of the expectations that I felt [when I was] there…what I should be feeling what I should be connecting with and not being able to meet those expectations was just kind of overwhelming.” William said, “Excited to go home to my family and see my family and see my fiancé (both laugh). Like very excited to see them!”

Others expressed a different reaction to leaving Korea. Mike shared, “When I left the first time...it was definitely, I was in paralysis and I think I was extremely…I was depressed.” William pointed to a sense of loss:

> There were other people that I was there with that I had met on [the trip] that were going back to [America] on the same flight…I think a big part of it too is that nobody that was Korean was with me at that point. I mean, there were Koreans on the plane but nobody, that I knew, [that were] part of my community...Yeah, they weren't with me.

Some participants noted a strong urge to stay or return to Korea for a longer period of time. Brett remembered leaving after his first trip to Korea:

> Going to the airport in the taxi cab and feeling really really sad about having to leave and trying to figure out ways how I could stay…[I was] going with the high school girl [I met] and one of her friends and I don't know if she explained to the taxi cab driver what happened or what was happening, but [at] the very end, he said, don't go…I think I wanted to stay there [in Korea after the first trip] longer, but because of money basically, I had to come back with plans to go after school. So, lengthening the trip didn't feel possible back then. But yeah, I would have liked to have stayed longer at that time.

Parker added, "[When I left] I remember wishing I would have spent at least like another week out there. I did not want to come back to the United States just yet." In terms of leaving Korea, Abby noted her feelings of relief and she used the analogy of eating broccoli, as if her trip was undesirable. William shared feeling excited not about leaving Korea, but being reunited with family members and his fiancée. Brett noted feeling paralyzed and depressed after leaving Korea, while William remarked upon feeling alone and disconnected from Korea as he was traveling back to the United States. Brett and Parker both shared how they wanted to stay in Korea for a longer period of time and didn't want to leave. Based on the accounts noted by the participants, Korean adoptees may have multiple reactions to leaving Korea after their visits. This ranged from wishing to stay longer to relief about getting back to life in the United States. The reactions noted by the participants also suggested the importance of acknowledging individual differences within this process. The image of having to eat broccoli may depict the struggle, displeasure, and even pain of having to return to Korea. Also, the paralyzing and significant sadness can also represent the grief and loss of the place and the culture. For each adoptee, the responses offered important insights into their experience visiting Korea, interaction within the Korean culture, and what that represents for them moving forward.

Reactions after returning to the US. All eight of the Korean adoptees noted reactions when they returned to the United States following their trip to Korea. Sub themes of *Difficult* and *Positive* will be further elaborated on within this theme.

Difficult. Some of the adoptees described sadness and depression-like symptoms after their return to the United States following their trip to Korea. Brett noted, "So [when I returned after my first trip to Korea] I was pretty sad, kind of depressed when I was back in the States…I just stayed in bed, not feeling very active (pause). That's pretty much it for maybe a matter of a couple of months." Maggie echoed a similar experience when returning to the US, "And so I went through a really heavy depression period when I came back, probably for a solid week where all I did was just like, cry and sleep and eat and cry and sleep and eat…[however,] it took me probably a solid month and a half until I felt kinda normal." Ramona also shared, "Yeah going there [to Korea] and coming back every time is so hard...pretty much [I've] gone into like a depression, for a month and a half, two months, like every single time I come back." Moreover, Ramona also reportedly used alcohol to cope with the transition, "I came back [from Korea in 2018] and I just couldn't, I couldn't focus. I just kind of sat and stared at the wall and then at night I would just drink and tune out...Then I would just start crying out of the blue. The alcohol was likely making me more emotional, but the crying spurts would just happen day and night at random times."

Other adoptees noted a sense of loneliness or isolation that occurred after returning to the United States. Maggie described how difficult it was to express her experience with her adoptive mother, "How do I talk about that? How do I talk about this sadness that I have at not being in this place anymore that I didn't even go to before 17 days ago and I knew existed, that I had no memory of and no connection to other than I had been born in it?

Um, how do I explain that to my mom who doesn't get it, you know? She just can't get it." This sentiment was also shared by William about his experience after arriving back to the United States:

> When I got back [to the US] people on the surface wanted to hear about my experience, they didn't want to really understand it…[For] everyone else it was how was your trip let's see the pictures, [they] saw the pictures and they didn't want to really engage in the experience with me and looking back on [it]. I think [they] would never be able to understand what it was for me.

Other participants also spoke about feeling a separation or missing South Korea after returning to the US. Maggie noted, "After that trip, it was like all I wanted to do was go to the Korean market and eat Korean food and cook Korean food and learn Korean…Where all I wanted to do was connect with that part." She continued, "I did go to Korean restaurants, and I did go to the Korean markets, maybe more than I would have before. And I did cook more Korean food to try and keep that connection alive for myself." Ramona noted, "[After returning from Korea in 2018] I really missed my [birth] family…I really missed just the [Korean] culture and everything about Korea."

Moreover, Ramona commented, "I think the hardest thing about coming back from Korea is…every time I go over there it's just out of this world. It's an amazing experience. And so just missing that and feeling like I'm missing out on this other life." Samantha also noted something similar, "When I came home [from Korea the second time] I felt as if that [Korean] part of me was almost gone, and it was just left over there." A very similar statement was made by William, "When I was leaving [Korea], I didn't know that I was leaving something there, this part of me...this basic form of who I am."

One of the participants, Abby reported a different response when returning back to the US following one of her trips back from Korea:

> I was pretty overwhelmed and pretty wrapped up in becoming a new parent and [it was] very easy to be distracted by that and not really have to explore maybe the emotions or what I was feeling. The same really the other two times I went. Because it was around our kids, then this last time with my family and then coming home and I have a full-time job and it's just very easy to get distracted by life.

Maggie, Ramona, and Brett all noted that after returning to the United States following their visit to South Korea that they experienced depression-like symptoms; feeling down, crying, and lethargy. William and Maggie experienced moments where others could not understand or relate to their experiences of being in Korea. Maggie, Ramona, Samantha, and William all discussed the feeling of separation or missing Korea; the Korean culture, identity, and people. After their return the Korean adoptees presented a sense of sadness, grieving, and leaving parts of themselves behind. Abby offered a divergent response when asked about her reactions to returning to the United States. Based on her personal circumstances that processing the experiences and exploring her personal reactions visiting Korea were sacrificed by her other needs. An overall interpretation is that visiting Korea evoked a wide range of feelings or thoughts and it took a significant amount of time and energy to create meaning from those excursions.

The separation from their birth country and return to their adoptive country seemed to evoke a strong and impactful reaction. Visiting Korea and returning to the United States depicted another clear and unmistakable tearing of the bond that separates

two selves within the adoptee. The comments made by the participants also suggested there was a reconnection of self when they returned to Korea, but also a separation or abandoning parts of one's self when leaving their birth country. The reaction of sadness, grief, and lethargy from the adoptees unveiled the difficulties with readjusting back to their daily lives, but also the lingering and continuous influence of South Korea in their lives. Another connected, but discrete process that also created potential problems for adoptees upon returning to the US was this sense of individualized loneliness. Without support, Korean adoptees may undergo a sense of isolation regarding the processing and expression of their experience when visiting Korea. This may mirror the same reaction they endured as children being raised in a home where their parents were not able to fully relate or understand their reactions to being a Korean international adoptee. This places the burden on the individual to reflect and make meaning of their experience versus feeling supported, validated, or understood. At times, this process may be overwhelming or difficult and may be sacrificed when prioritized against other responsibilities and obligations.

Positive. Mike noted in his interview that traveling to Korea has contributed to his personal growth, "I think for me personally, the trips [to Korea] were amazing and I think that they're definitely transformative, even though the first time I was struggling a lot. The second time I struggled a lot. The last time I think it definitely was helpful." Mike noted that the trips to Korea, "Were all kind of a process [to] just build who I was as an adoptee [and] as a Korean. And I think that process you can't really have a substitute for and I think that I learned a lot." Parker also shared about his positive reaction to visiting Korea, "I think for a long time I just coasted on the idea [of]

being American and…There's so much more to just being an American now [after the trip to Korea]." Samantha also expressed a sense of evolution following her second trip to Korea, "Since being back now I think about the experience a lot and how it's helped me grow as a person and become more independent and really understand my cultural background and how I would have grown up there and different things like that." However, others noted a sense of relief of coming back from their trip to Korea after returning to the US. Abby said, "So to be able to come back and kind of go back to my day to day life without all of those kinds of things hanging over me [regarding Korean language and culture] was a relief." Brett added, "Very easy [when I came back for my 3rd and 4th trips to Korea] there was no sadness or depression at all. It was just ah a relief to be back. Yeah, [being] in your own bed, in your own home [a] completely different experience."

Mike, Parker, and Samantha commented on how the trip to Korea was the catalyst for personal growth through identity development, cultural exposure, and developing personal meaning. Abby and Brett shared that coming back to the United States after their trip to Korea can feel familiar, relaxing, and relieving. For the first three adoptees, the trip to Korea and return to the United States may have been an important time marker in their personal development. This objective event, could have contributed to growth, evolution, and learning. This personal change event seemed to be a catalyst for some Korean adoptees to explore, identify, and assimilate new meaning. The interaction with Korea has the potential to alter Korean adoptees' relationship with their sense of self and relationship with others. For the two other adoptees, it was interesting to hear that the trip can also be burdensome and returning back to the United States can feel as though a

weight has been lifted from their shoulders. The trip to Korea seemed to be mentally and physically exhausting and returning back to the cultural, social, and personal familiarity of the United States could represent a sense of personal relief and accomplishment.

Identity

The superordinate theme of *Identity* included the descriptions of Korean adoptees intersection of multiple identities, exploring the salience of one or more identities within different contexts, and self-identification among the participants in the sample. The primary subordinate themes were noted as *Intersection of Identity*, *Salience of Identity*, and *Self-Identity*.

Intersection of identity. All of the participants reported the intersectionality of multiple identities and also the intersectionality of their sense of self with their White cultural world. The sub themes were: *Adoptee Identity and Physical Appearance*, *Ethnicity and Race*, *Korean and American*, *Intersection of Two or More Identities*, and *Intersection with the White World*. These will be further described within this section.

Adoptee identity and physical appearance. Abby noted, “My mind is that I'm Korean and I was adopted, not only Korean, I was adopted…But it's very difficult for me to [say], oh, that happened to me because I was adopted. Or that person reacted to me in that way [because I'm Korean] I mean it's hard to separate the two.” Mike noted a different reaction when reflecting on his physical appearance and adoptee identity, “I'd always just say though it's a process...to be a Korean adoptee and...separating those two being Korean and [an] adoptee...they'll have different sort of meanings and they're all different identities and I definitely had to go through each one [of those] identities.” This process of identifying and sorting through identities seemed to be relevant for William,

"Being adopted...it's never really been focused on a lot...[there's] been more focus on [the] being Korean part, which I think [is] just part of what feeds into the identity problems that I have."

Sometimes the interaction between the adoptee identity and physical appearance can be influenced by the environment or setting. Maggie noted, "I am proud to be Korean, and I'm proud to be an adoptee…It's a part of who I am, and I get to be that person." However, she also reported an instance where the congruence between her adoptee identity and her physical appearance were challenged, "When I would go to nail salons, usually [the Korean workers] would always come up, [and] they would ask if I was Korean either in Korean or in English, and I would explain, Yes, I am, but I'm adopted, so I don't speak Korean…Then it was usually met with silence or shame. So, I was like, cool, okay I guess I feel bad about [my identities] now. Parker also provided an example of when your physical appearance interacts with being an adoptee, "Oh no it's funny [when the teacher called out an Asian name and looked at me] because...I think that's another way of seeing…how I guess people stereotype other cultures, like that association [between] an Asian sounding name with an Asian, which I guess makes total sense. But, like being adopted I don't have an Asian name or Korean name.

Abby reported that it was difficult for her to separate her adoptee identity with being Korean. However, for Mike, Maggie, and William, they noted a separation of their adoptee identity with their physical appearance or ethnic identity. For Parker and Maggie, the context or setting evoked reactions related to being an adoptee and identifying with their ethnic or racial identity. The Korean adoptees within this sub theme provided some variance in terms of how their adoptee identity and physical

appearance could be intertwined or differentiated. There seemed to be different strategies used to make sense of and further reflect upon the impact of their adoptee identity when it interacted with their physical appearance. The enmeshment of physical appearance with adoptee identity may be intimately connected based on the adoption experience within a multi-racial and ethnic household; while also establishing a connection to their Korean heritage or lineage. The intertwining of the adoptee identity and physical appearance can be particularly challenging when confronted by external circumstances. These encounters could evoke an emotional reaction that forces the Korean adoptee to reassess their self-identification in the moment or over time. Individually and collectively these and other social situations may offer pivotal moments for identity reflection and recalibration, particularly if there was new information to assimilate or accommodate.

Ethnicity and race. Maggie noted observations when visiting Korea:

> The first moment that…left a really lasting impression was...I looked, I stood at the base of the King Sejong statue, and I looked up at it, and I started crying (I cry at everything). So, I started crying, and I remember just feeling like, this statue: he looks like me and he's golden, and he's revered for what he did and no one's making fun of it you know? It was just this completely different experience of what being Korean, and what being Asian meant for my whole life.

William shared that sometimes race and ethnicity were conflated together and he found ways to cope when it occurred, "Sometimes it's just easier to be identified as, oh, he is that Asian guy or he is that Korean guy because it just makes it a lot easier to focus if I'm in the crowd, he's the Korean guy over there. Easy to point [out]...because there's only one [Asian guy] in the room." Mike also noted how his personal identities

interacted with his environment growing up, “It forced me to look at things in a different way. That I couldn't look at things the way that an Asian community did or...look at things in a way, say, a white community or a traditional American family could either because I was stuck between both of them.”

Maggie noted that visiting Korea and seeing a famous statue allowed her to redefine what being a Korean and Asian meant. The narrative of being renowned and recognized for good seemed to diverge from being degraded or made fun of. For William, he noted that being labeled and identified as Asian and Korean seemed to co-occur based on the lack of racial and ethnic diversity within different contexts. Instead of describing Asian and Korean, Mike noted how his personal experiences allowed him to look at things through the racial lens of being Asian, while describing his American family through an ethnic lens. He felt stuck between both of them. The use of categories or identifiers, particularly based on ethnicity and race appeared to be particularly relevant for the Korean adoptee experience. Without the support or guidance from parental figures or peers, Korean adoptees may be susceptible to being attacked or labeled through their multiple physical identities. Particularly in multi-racial and multi-ethnic families, Korean adoptees could feel stuck or report difficulties with consolidating multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds into an integrated sense of self.

Korean and American. This interaction was presented by Maggie:

> Which I have experienced a little bit from other Korean people. Like, why don't you know Korean? Why don't you know this? Why don't you know that? So, it's been very varied, but I would say that overwhelmingly so, it's been very positive. I mean I still have to grapple with, I don't know what anyone’s saying when I go

> to the Korean market, and I have to try and fumble my way through little interactions with people who work at the store. Luckily, most of them speak English, but they definitely have given me the looks of, why are you not speaking in Korean and why don't you understand what I'm saying?

William also shared his frustration when interacting with Korean people in Korea:

> I felt really guilty that I didn't speak Korean. I felt really guilty that I didn't know all these cultural norms. I mean I knew before I got there [to Korea], a lot because [I] spent a lot [of time] with Koreans here [in America]. But still, not knowing those things then was frustrating, you know, having to learn to say I don't speak Korean, I am American. And being very fluent in saying that, which just was very confusing for everybody.

Mike seemed to have taken a different take and spoke through the lens of identity, "To be a Korean adoptee [is] kind of what my mom always says is like having it kind of the best of both worlds. Where you can be Korean, but you can also be American and kind of understand both values and what both identities can bring to the table." To provide a visual, Ramona said, "I feel like I'm living in...a Venn diagram. I'm in the middle part of the circle and you've got your biological family and your American family." William described, "I have this dominant culture and then this dominant culture [referring to Korean and American culture]. And then I'm in the middle of blending. I feel like I'm my own community and that's really evolved." Samantha said, "Because even the culture over there [in Korea is] so different. And going from being in the big city, all the way back home to the small town I live in. It was just like two opposite sides of a coin almost, where they're both amazing and both different [in] ways and I love

being [in] both places. But they don't correspond...they both just have very different impacts on my life." Mike also detailed how this sense of connection or affiliation can change between his Korean and American identity over time:

> I think it was in 2015, I'm sorry year right after I kind of felt the opposite. Like I was there [in Korea for my second trip back], I was happy to be there but I right away. I was just like; I don't really want to be here right now. I liked the American things, I like American people better...I was really more critical towards Korean society, critical towards my Korean identity.

However, after his visit to Korean in 2018, Mike said, "I felt like [the trip to Korea in 2018] that was kind of honestly the pinnacle of my identity Korean identity and my American identity merged together. And I would say it's the pinnacle, because...all my experiences were kind of leading up to that." This experience of identity shifting and changing was also reported by Parker, "I think there was always this disconnect of like am I a Korean versus am I American? And it wasn't until I would say probably five years ago, or 10 years ago where it dawned on me. I mean, it was like you're both of these races and you can either shun one out completely or you can accept it and figure out where you need to grow in that area to embrace that."

Maggie noted when she interacts with Korean people in American spaces that there was some confusion because she was unable to communicate in Korean. William recalled his experiences of feeling frustrated and guilty for not being able to intuitively communicate in Korean and decipher cultural norms in Korea. These moments seemed to remind the adoptees that they are American. For Mike, William, and Ramona there was explicit acknowledgement that there was an American and Korean world; while

Ramona shared that she was the middle overlap within the Venn diagram. William described it as the blending of the two worlds. Samantha noted being in Korea versus America was like as different as two different sides of a coin. Mike and Parker also explained how identifying as Korean and American can shift over time.

For some adoptees there seemed to be a reference to two different and distinct worlds. For instance, the use of the Venn diagram offered an important visual of how the Korean and American background or identity can be distinct and separate, but can also have overlap with the exposure Korean adoptees receive. This overlap and blending may change, shift, and be difficult at times to make sense of. The impact of those identities and experiences may not directly impact the American or Korean circles, but continuously shape the relationship between the circles through the self-definition and feelings associated with being a Korean adoptee. These personal shifts within the diagram may reveal connections with self and others; or could even contribute to shunning or abandoning aspects of personhood. Within that process of intersecting circles, there may be instances where the setting and context strongly influence the blending or overlap in the Venn diagram. When this occurs, there can be moments of frustration, confusion, and acknowledgement. Within this subtheme there were many examples of how identifying as Korean and American interacted and also impacted the Korean adoptee experience. The common thread seemed to denote how these backgrounds and identities can represent inherent difference; these labels may also connect or intersect through different experiences.

Intersection of two or more identities. Mike shared, "I was going through a lot more [as a 13-year-old]. I was going through the transition of, what does it mean to be adopted, what does it mean to be Asian? What does it mean to be a man? All these things are kind of a part of it and they're all happening at the same time." Parker also noted the intersectionality of identity included sexual orientation and ethnicity, "I was thinking about that because it's like, why can't you be happy where you are, for like a good five or 10 years or something like that? Is it because you're trying to prove that you're gay, that you can move yourself up, or is it because you're trying to prove that you're Korean [and] trying to move yourself up?" Ramona also felt the impact of her gender and ethnic background:

> My last job I felt othered because I was being pushed out of the company…They had no grounds to fire me or to lay me off. There was no good reasoning, because I was doing my job and I was being flown around the country to work with some of the biggest clients that this company had and I did feel like I was being targeted for my race, but also being a woman.

William seemed to struggle with making sense of his many ethnic and cultural backgrounds, "It's hard as a Korean adoptee...That's not my identifying marker [as a] Korean adoptee, it's still struggling with this Korean, American, Korean, Minnesotan [background]." With so much variation, William recognized, "And the way that Korean adoptees tend to identify differently with being Korean and with being American or Caucasian in a lot of instances." More generally, Maggie reported, "I think it's, so different, the Korean experience versus the Korean American experience or Asian American experience. I think they're so different."

Mike noted as a teenager how he questioned his sense of masculinity as an Asian male. Parker shared how he sought answers related to his motivation with work recognition and if that was related to identifying as an Asian gay male. Ramona spoke about how she believed being an Asian woman working in her career contributed to being pushed out by her last employer. William and Maggie both described how there can be within-group variation when speaking about Korean adoptees, Koreans, or Asian people.

The examples offered provided how complex and multifaceted identity can be. The Korean adoptees appeared to be aware of how personal experiences with identity were salient for them within multiple contexts. Also, there seemed to be an appreciation and identification of within-group difference among other Korean and Asian groups. This suggested that Korean adoptees have insight into their own and others' description of identity and the intersectionality of multiple identities. Not only was there the ability to notice multiple or intersecting identities, but also the awareness of how identity can fluctuate and change over time. The classification of Korean adoptee identity should be taken with great caution and examined through a multi-dimensional scale versus simplistic descriptors that are absent of additional inquiry.

Intersection with the White world. Abby shared her experience as a child, "And at that age, you want to blend in and you want to be like everyone else. And so, I wanted to identify the way that my friends did which all my friends, happened to be White." Maggie added, "Because that's what I was surrounded by literally all the time between my family, in school, and my friends. It was all white kids." William said, "In Minnesota, there's a…pretty large population of Korean adoptees but [the] majority of us grew up in all White communities. A lot of times we're the only person of color in the

entire school." Ramona also shared her experience growing up, "I grew up in a completely Anglo neighborhood. There's pretty much one Asian at my school and that was me up until high school. Um, maybe two or three [Asians]. There were very few African Americans. There were very few just [racial and ethnic] minorities in any of my growing up until I got to high school, which was [the] inner city."

Brett also remembered from his youth, "When I looked in the mirror and my face wasn't White...I'm pretty sure that growing up seeing only White faces. And not being White sort of others yourself." Ramona noted another impact of being raised in a primarily White community as a child, "Being an adoptee I just feel like I've never really fit fully. I haven't really identified completely. I'd say I mostly identify with the White community that I grew up in versus the Korean Korean community."

As adults, some of the participants also commented on their experiences living or working in primarily or all-White spaces. Parker said, "It feels a little weird sometimes [after being asked what it's like to speak with non-racial minorities]. Yeah, that last office that I worked at [where] I was the only [racial and ethnic] minority. It was a little weird where oh my goodness, nobody, there are no minorities, there are no people of color in this office. And I don't know, it feels a little weird." William also mentioned, "I work in a world that is basically all White…When I walk into a room I [am] Korean, Asian because, you know, people can't tell the difference." Ramona shared, "It's been a little bit of a step back in terms of culture [after moving to a less diverse area] and there's very little [racial and ethnic] minorities, where we're living here...there's not really any diversity here. There's not really any culture."

Abby, Maggie, Ramona, Brett, and William all recalled memories of growing up and being in primarily White or all White communities. William and Parker noted specific examples of their experiences working in companies where there was little or no racial and ethnic diversity. Ramona noted how she currently lives in an area where there's not any culture or diversity related to people of color. Starting in childhood, the Korean adoptees used the terms of being surrounded by White kids or communities. Moreover, one of the participants used the word surrounded by, as if they were engrossed with White people and culture starting as children. The adoption of Korean children into primarily White families affected their level of socialization with White peers and environments starting at a young age. This process of seeing primarily White people and children appeared to shape personal development and self-concept. The mirroring of White people and White cultural norms contributed to formulating the acceptability of appearance and other social standards. Even leading into adulthood, some of the Korean adoptees still found themselves either living or working in predominantly White spaces. I wondered how being surrounded by the White world as children possibly influenced the choices of being in White environments as adults. Despite awareness noted by the participants, it was curious that the Korean adoptees made choices to remain in situations or contexts where they were the clear minority in terms of physical appearance.

Salience of identity. All of the Korean adoptees noted instances where certain identities were salient, either with certain groups of people, spaces, or measuring salience along a spectrum. The sub themes identified were *Asian Spaces and People*, *White Spaces and People*, *Local Community*, and *General Salience of Identity*.

Asian spaces and people. Abby shared about the salience of her Korean adoptee identity, "I think for me, when it becomes very prevalent is when I go to Korean camp. When I go to Korea. Ironic, that is when I become very aware of [being a Korean adoptee]. And it's because I feel ironically, because I feel like I stick out. Because I don't feel Korean." Maggie also felt this way in Korea, "I didn't feel very Korean. I know I look Korean, but I don't feel Korean." Brett also described, "So the obvious things that bring up thoughts and feelings about being adopted [are] being in Korea [and] being in Japan, where people look like me." More specifically in Korea, Brett added, "There's always this consciousness having been adopted, you know, the streets [in Korea]. I'm walking on and these are the streets that my mother walked on [and it] gave me a hard time." Ramona also remarked about her impression when in Korea, "It's just interesting I know I stand out when I go over there by the way that I dress, by the way that I carry myself, by the way that I am. Nobody does anything negative, but it's just apparent that I am an adoptee."

Abby, Maggie, Brett, and Ramona shared how the salience of their adoptee identity is heightened when they were in Korea. Abby reported when she attended Korean culture camp that her awareness of being a Korean adoptee was heightened. Brett also noted that being in Japan where people looked like him was related to increasing the salience of being an adoptee. For some of the adoptees, their adoptee identity becomes highlighted due to not feeling as though they fit in with the cultural norms or physical appearance of being Korean. Brett specifically shared that being in Korea increased his awareness of his adoptee identity due to consciously feeling and connecting with his birth mother. For Korean adoptees being in Korean or Asian places,

there seemed to be an unconscious comparison that occurred despite sharing spaces with people who looked similarly. There appeared to be a natural comparison and acknowledgement that the level of cultural exposure or ethnic identity with Asian spaces reminded the participants about their adoption or adoptee narrative.

In terms of interacting with Korean people, Brett said, “If I meet Koreans, for example I always bring it up [that I’m an adoptee] just so they understand [that I] don't have the same cultural background as they do or I don't have the same experiences that they do.” Maggie noted:

> If I'm with Korean Korean people, either native Koreans or transplant Koreans, then I'm much more aware of the adoptee part. So, for example, I was with one of my friends. We were at Korean BBQ a couple weeks ago…I certainly wasn't the only Asian person in the place, but I felt my adoptee identity much more strongly because of being surrounded by native Koreans who had transplanted to New York…When they were talking to each other in Korean or talking to customers in Korean or doing little things like that…that's when I am generally more aware of: the adoptee part where I feel and kind of notice the schism, if you want to use that word, between myself and them.

Mike also said, “[Interacting with Korean people] definitely has heightened my awareness of being a Korean and adopted, but I think that it's kind of evolved into its own form as well.” In a more explicit way, William expressed:

> When we first got there [to Korea] we went on a field trip. We went whitewater rafting. I remember sitting in the seat in the back of the raft. And the guy was giving directions in Korean and I'm sitting there; we're on this river, and I'm

like...this is great and I hear the pow pow pow. Oh, well, [and he] just [was] yelling at me and all the Korean girls are just laughing and I turned and looked. And one of the [Korean] girls pulled over to him. And they're like he's American he has no idea what you're saying. He looked at me [and said], you row, row hard (both laugh). He's yelling at me and everybody's, like all the Koreans are laughing at me.

Some of the participants noted experiences when interacting with other Korean adoptees and how it related to the salience of their Korean adoptee identity. Abby spoke:

> I do have a friend who is also a Korean adoptee and we sit down; we talk about our experiences. Because I get to connect with her and then that becomes an awareness. It kind of forces you to think about different experiences in your life, how it's different from her experience. You know how she sees it versus how I see it. So, because you're having that dialogue more, it's more prevalent and in my mind.

Brett also shared, "On a day to day basis, I think it's not something [referring to his Korean adoptee identity] I typically think about unless [I am] with other Korean adoptees." Samantha detailed how certain Korean adoptee spaces evoked a similar response, "When I'm always in that area [near the Korean culture camp], that always reminds me of good times [and] learning about my culture and different things like that."

Brett, Abby, and Mike noted how generally when they were in the same space with Korean people that their adoptee identity was heightened. William recalled a specific story in Korea where being an American was noted because of not being able to understand the Korean commands coming from the boat leader. Abby and Brett also

described how interacting with other Korean adoptees could increase the salience of their Korean adoptee identity. Samantha said that even being in the area where she used to attend Korean culture camp also reminded her of the past times where she learned about Korean culture as a child.

For Korean adoptees being in spaces or places with Korean people and Korean adoptees increased their awareness identifying as an adoptee or Korean adoptee. When spending time with Korean people or in Korean spaces, the participants noted those instances were seen as schisms or specific differences between them culturally or linguistically. For William, the aspect that stuck out to him was the laughter he received when he was unable to understand the directions noted in the boat. The reminders about being an adoptee seemed to be based on the inability to understand or know about Korean heritage, culture, and language. The observations noted by the Korean adoptees pointed to different experiential opportunities and learned understanding due to being raised in typically non-Korean households, social, or cultural systems. In contrary, Korean adoptees also reported the salience of their Korean adoptee identity appeared to occur when in the presence of other Korean adoptees or in Korean adoptee spaces. The conversations, shared experiences, or memories seemed to increase the visibility of the Korean adoptee sense of self for the participants. The narratives from the participants offered a variety of different settings and people that evoked aspects of their adoptive history and identity. These examples noted within the collective group of the interviewees again reinforced how self-identification was malleable and was co-constructed with the environment.

White spaces and people. Abby noted her experiences as a child:

> Just being physically different and that being challenging as a girl, trying to figure out how you navigate the whole makeup situation with not having folds in your eyelids and having a different skin tone and there's not makeup out there for those skin tones. I mean that's changed significantly now, but back when I was growing up that was a lot more challenging.

For Maggie, this awareness of being a Korean adoptee also began when she was a child, "And [being a Korean adoptee] was what made me different and what made me stand out. And what made me not like everybody else; definitely impacted by the fact that I was the only Asian kid throughout all of elementary school." Moreover, Maggie noted, "I would say that often when I'm in mostly White spaces I don't think about [being a Korean adoptee] as often as I think I used to when I was growing up and [when I was] really starting to struggle with and figuring out my identity and where I fit. Mike said, "I didn't have the luxury of being around people that looked like me, so it's like I knew automatically that I was a Korean adoptee because people told me and just because people were different around [me]."

As adults in White predominant spaces, Korean adoptees also seemed affected by the context to which they lived or worked. William shared an example, "I never really have discussions about being a Korean adoptee. I have conversations about being not White, where I am now, where I live, and that's fine it [does] get a little old after a while."

For instance, Parker described:

> My last job that I was at, I was there for a while and I never got promoted. And I was able to take on a bunch of different job responsibilities, like, [when] people would quit I was taking on their jobs, but I was never promoted. And it was a predominantly Caucasian office. I mean...all the people around me would get promoted and it was one of those things where it's like, is this because I'm not White, or is this because I'm Asian?

For Maggie and Abby starting in childhood, there was an awareness that they were different, but there were also questions about where they fit in. Mike seemed to reflect his deduction of being different was based on who he was generally around and how they seemed visually different than him. In adulthood, Parker and William seemed to recognize race and how their own thoughts reflected not being White. Overall, for all of the participants there seemed to be an understanding that they weren't White, but through all of the entries there was an implicit or explicit comparison with their White communities, workplaces, or peers. The absence of similar looking people, due to being raised or living in a heavily White area could have significantly impacted the salience of one or more identities for Korean adoptees. Being in primarily White spaces or with White people as children or adults appeared to heighten the attention brought toward self-identification and personal awareness regarding themselves in relation to others around them because of race and ethnicity. Using shopping for makeup as the metaphor, when the item is not there or the only possibilities are for White people, the contrast is salient. The salience of other non-White identities may be diminished if there is messaging that White products are the best or the only items that were available. Over time, the inability

to find suitable makeup for the Korean adoptees may have contributed to self-questioning or assimilating into another group or demographic. This inherent dissimilarity may contribute to identity salience, identity confusion or foreclosure that could be an additional source of distress.

Local community. Abby reported her identity as a Korean adoptee stood out:

> In school, it makes you feel okay, I can't participate, like other people can. You know, and then [doing] the family tree thing and then [in] genetics we were doing a segment on genetics and understanding...Oh, your dad has blond hair, your mom has blue eyes. This is how that all [happens] and participating in that kind of discussion as an outsider, like I couldn't relate to the examples. I couldn't do the exercises…Yeah, so the science, the genetic thing piece I think that it was more about feeling left out, you know, like I couldn't have that.

Parker offered an instance when his Korean adoptee identity was salient:

> It doesn't really happen now that I'm older, but it used to happen a lot when I was younger. My [adoptive] parents have dropped me off at school and my classmates to me [say], how come your parents are white, or so it would happen a lot more? Back then maybe it's because [I was] around my [adoptive] parents more, but it doesn't really happen as much as my classmates wondering [when I was younger].

A similar example was shared by Samantha, "One time [that] really just stood out and I remember it was 10th grade in this history class. We were talking about everyone's heritage and I remember the assignment was to go back home and talk to your

[biological] mom about how she felt after having you as a baby and I couldn't do that assignment being that I was adopted and I didn't have a birth mom to talk to."

Mike noted a process of identifying differences between he and his adoptive parents, "I realized when I was younger, that I was different from my [adoptive] parents and stuff like that…And that's where I knew that I was more Korean by looking at people that weren't Korean. Parker also shared about growing up with his adoptive family, "Growing up with [a] multicultural [family]…sometimes people growing up, they would assume that my sister and I were on dates with each other. So that'd be kind of uncomfortable." He continued, "So I think that's usually the big times when [being a Korean adoptee] made its presence known...I guess [when] people know that I don't look like my...[adoptive] parents. So, they just assume that they're either my friends or my partner or something, so it's kind of awkward." Ramona also provided a story that was similar to Parker:

> [My adoptive father and I] would be out to dinner at a restaurant, and it would happen, someone would come up and it might have been just a server or something... [And say] you guys are enjoying a date night or something like that? Um, so that was uncomfortable and I just kind of learned to laugh. You know my [adoptive] dad would laugh it off. I would kind of uncomfortably laugh it off, but those things definitely raised awareness to me that I was different.

For Abby and Samantha attending certain classes that touched on biological family or traits increased their attention of being an adoptee. Parker faced questioning from peers about the physical differences noted between he and his adoptive parents, those events reminded him that he was adopted and looked dissimilarly from his adoptive

parents. Mike, Parker, and Ramona noted through their interactions with adoptive family members that the salience of race and being adopted occurred. The salience of one or more identities for the participants seemed to appear when their experiences did not fit with the normative narrative of being a child within a non-adoptive family. The person's awareness of being physically different within the family system was also linked with the salience of being a Korean adoptee as well. Others' actions and messages about the normative family makeup seemed related to feeling discomfort, awkwardness, or even beliefs about being an outsider. As in the examples with familial interactions being mistaken for romantic arrangements, it again put a lot of the pressure for the adoptee to address these concerns intra or interpersonally. Moreover, it may have reinforced the notion that family cannot be composed of members who may not share the same phenotypic features, along with other biases that are not specifically related being an adoptee; such as heterogeneity within romantic relationships as well.

General salience of identity. Maggie offered her thoughts regarding salience of identity within context:

> Think my awareness [of being a Korean adoptee] definitely depends on who I'm with and where we might be, and probably how I'm feeling in that particular moment, but I've noticed that I don't get as specific as thinking, oh, I'm a Korean adoptee when I'm with non-Korean people. Basically that it kind of is just more generalized, like, oh, I'm either the only person of color in the room, or I'm the only Asian person or Asian woman…I think being around Korean people makes me…almost hyper aware of the adoptee part, not necessarily the Asian part,

> whereas being around non-Korean people, mostly white people, I'm more aware of the Asian part and not as aware of the adoptee part.

Mike also noted that identity salience can be nuanced and dependent on the setting: "What influences your awareness? Um, I think the most obvious is just who I'm around, whoever that happens to be, sometimes it's my parents. Sometimes it's my extended family. Sometimes it's also just fellow Koreans, not so much adoptees but there are Korean adoptees as well that I sometimes kind of mirror, who I am." Parker also provided an example of how context can influence his self-identification:

> So, there was always this sense of discrimination towards the African Americans and the White students at the middle school [and] elementary school [I attended]. So, I think I would always associate with my Asian identity during those times because it didn't feel like a risk as being part of a White category versus an Asian [one]. Yeah, so I think that's a good example of...a flip off where it's okay I associated with being White because my [adoptive] parents are White, but at the same time, Asian. So, we're going to go with the Asian side on this one because hopefully I won't be discriminated against.

In addition to setting being an instrumental piece towards self-identification and identity salience, some of the Korean adoptees noted generalized salience of identity. For instance, Abby shared, "I would forget sometimes that I'm not White...I mean, it's not like you would carry around the mirror, right?" William also offered another example about his Korean adoptee identity, "I've lived here basically my whole life [in Minnesota] so until recently, I was conscious of it, but I never reflected on it. I never really thought about it, [it] was just the way it was." Other participants noted that being a Korean

adoptee was much more prominent, Samantha noted, “Growing up, I always tried to embrace who I was and being Korean was a huge part of my identity.” Maggie noted, “[being adopted] definitely bled out into every aspect, I think, of how I lived my life in a lot of different ways.”

Maggie described how the context can change the salience of one or multiple identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, or being an adoptee. Mike noted that the people or the setting could influence not only the salience of identity, but how he chooses to self-identify in the moment. Parker detailed how race was highlighted for him when he attempted to navigate racial tensions between multiple groups at school. Abby and William reported that their overall attunement to being a Korean adoptee was not particularly high. Samantha shared that being a Korean was an important aspect of self, while Maggie described how being an adoptee was prominent for her in a myriad of ways.

The spectrum of identity salience was varied and could be intricately connected to the present or past context. Highlighting one or more social and cultural identities appeared to be dependent on the setting, people in the environment, or personal reflection that occurred in the moment. These recounted stories offered a unique glimpse into the dynamic process of self-identification and how it may evolve within different contexts over time. In addition to unique situations that raised the attention to one or more identities, participants also described how aspects of self were not solely connected to context. This may mean that attention or consciousness toward identity could be generally depressed or elevated or both throughout time. These individual differences may have reflected a Korean adoptees’ exploration, development, and awareness of

multiple social and cultural identities. The utility of identity salience could be viewed as an alternative to understanding or viewing identity as concrete, developmental, or even stagnant across a body of time.

Self-Identity. All of the participants endorsed aspects of self-identification, provided comments regarding their identity formation process, along with offering their feedback to being a Korean adoptee. The sub themes are: *Adoptee or Adopted*, *American*, *Korean*, *Identity Formation*, and *Reactions to Being a Korean Adoptee*. These sub themes will be discussed below.

Adoptee or adopted. Abby shared, "I actually was adopted…from Korea." Maggie noted, "I was adopted at seven months." William said, "I was born in Korea and I was adopted." Of all the participants, only Ramona specifically stated, "I'm an adoptee."

For Abby, Maggie, and William they explicitly expressed that they were adopted, with William and Abby referencing Korea. While, Ramona shared that she was an adoptee. It was interesting to observe the past tense of an action that occurred versus the present tense identification with being an adoptee. Hearing adopted sounds as if something had occurred in the past to the person. This may have also represented an identity, but not something the adoptee identified with outside of clarifying their past history with others. However, when someone says they are an adoptee, it seemed to represent an active identity. Moreover, the active nature may also be associated with how the person chooses to see their overall sense of self and themselves in relation toward others.

American. Parker shared, “I always made it up in my mind. I was like no I’m American.” William noted, “I will start [with] the American part because that's easy. That's the dominant culture in which I live in, and specifically Caucasian American because that's what my [adoptive] family is...[they're] all Caucasian but...it's just part of who I am.” Maggie added, “I do very much identify with the Italian-American culture because that's what I've grown up with.”

Parker reported specifically that he was American. William and Maggie seemed to refer to being American as part of who they were based on how they were socialized growing up. Given the responses from all three people there appeared to be some variation in how Korean adoptees may refer or identify as American. The identity of American seemed to refer both to the socialization experiences of being raised within an American household or cultural system, while also associated with a particular ethnic identity. The definition of what being American is initially began with their adoptive family, initial environment, and relevant messaging of what that meant. Identifying the degree of American cultural and White racial socialization that occurred may influence how each Korean adoptee self-identifies. For these adoptees, the exposure to American culture seemed to have interlaced itself with how they cultivated their sense of self.

Korean. Abby noted, “Okay, yep, that's physically who I am [Korean].” Parker added about his sense of Korean identity, “I think that it never really mattered to me being an Asian in [Colorado] because I have always understood and known that I am Korean.” William said, “I identify with that [Korean] part of myself.” Moreover, two of the participants introduced themselves with their Korean names, “Yu Jen” and “Hee Jin.”

Abby seemed to differentiate that being Korean represented physically who she was. Parker noted that he identified as Korean, while William noted that being Korean was a part of how he saw himself. Moreover, two of the participants referenced their Korean names during the interviews. There was a wide spectrum when it came to self-identification regarding the adoptees' Korean self or identity. From the Korean adoptee answers, I wonder if this wide gradient may have represented or be associated with Korean identity exploration and acceptance. Also, identifying as Korean could be different if they were introducing themselves as Korean versus internally identifying with that aspect of who they are. This offered a glimpse into how Korean adoptees integrate their "Korean" background in how they describe themselves to others. More specifically, this may have reflected how they see themselves when speaking to another fellow Korean adoptee. The self-identification as Korean may match with how they are perceived, view themselves, or could also be integrated into their overall sense of self.

Identity formation. Some of the participants noted times when they would minimize or invalidate aspects of their identities. Maggie noted an example of this, "[My Korean adoptee friend] basically summarized everything that I had been feeling because she said I feel like I should just know [Korean] already, because I'm Korean. I should just be able to speak it and actually be able to not have to learn it. I should just know it. And when I don't, I feel like I'm almost a fake, like I'm a fraud Korean. Sometimes this would take the place of invalidating or minimizing the validity of their Korean backgrounds. Ramona remembered how this process started as a child, "I guess that was what I desired when I was younger, as I really didn't want to be Asian, I didn't want to be. I didn't want to look different and have to deal with a different body structure and a

different race and all that." Parker provided an example of this internal conflict, "I think I fought it for a while. I mean, there was definitely this point where I was like, I'm not a Korean so like all my [art]work is about who I am as an American." Moreover, Mike shared, "I do remember feeling my inside stuff and they reflected that sort of macho mentality and I'm trying to be the Western man. I guess and not really relate to anything Eastern or where I came from, at least from a masculine standpoint; don't associate with Korean male models, don't associate with Korean culture, don't."

For Maggie, she seemed to tie the validity of her Korean identity with her difficulty to learn Korean. Ramona, Parker, and Mike all shared how at different times they didn't want to associate themselves with being Korean; for Mike and Ramona that seemed to remind them of how they didn't match certain expectancies and norms. For the participants there held certain beliefs or expectations that were attached to being Korean. The Korean adoptees displayed how they wanted to avoid recognizing themselves as Korean, not because it was inherently negative but because of what it meant as a Korean adoptee. Being a Korean adoptee within an American or White cultural system meant that you were not attractive, different, or even a fraud. The messaging was internalized and appeared to be moved towards themselves, versus toward their dissatisfaction with the familial, cultural, or social systems in the United States. The different examples seemed to reflect how each person attempted to cope with being Korean or adopted, while living in America.

The Korean adoptee participants noted how certain events acted as the catalysts for processes involved in identity development. Maggie mentioned, "I don't think I realized [that the Korean restaurant owner] until a lot later that she was so instrumental in

making it almost okay for me to explore the Korean part of my identity." Mike noted, "And even the Korean church...they've always kind of invited my [adoptive] family into this church and always supported us and helped us develop our own identities and they always let us in. And I guess they always helped us if we wanted to learn the [Korean] language, they always helped us, they introduced us to the [Korean] food."

Other participants noted important time markers that contributed to the exploration of one or more of their social and cultural identities. William said, "[In college with Korean people] and then exploring that and seeing, do I want this or...is this a part of me, or is it not and realizing that it is to a point how deep can I go without losing this part of myself." Parker seemed to have a similar response:

> So, in college I explored my identity a lot. That's where I also think that it helped me become a little bit stronger about who I was as a person. Because, I focused so much on that for three semesters in college, which is a long time. There's a lot of time thinking about yourself. So, I think my art...helped make me a stronger person when it came to understanding who I am.

Samantha reported, "Yeah, I remember when I was probably [in] seventh grade…I was getting more curious about my identity as a Korean adoptee and I was really starting to embrace that side of me."

The participants also shared how identity change occurred for them over time. Maggie offered her perspective, "I think that's kind of been the biggest challenge that I have felt throughout my life, of trying to figure out what side I'm on. Even though now as an adult, I...think it's pretty common, but especially when you're trying to understand yourself and the world and how you relate to it and where you are in it, that it's much

easier to just think of it as this side or this side. Mike also shared what this process looked like for him, "That process of trying on different identities...when you're younger, I thought that it was unique to me...you have to try on different identities and things…but I realized that a lot of people did go through the same things I did...I was [just] going through a lot more...shoes in [the] proverbial sense than many other people." William's reaction referred to his identity exploration, "I haven't really [been] intentional about doing [this] until you know the past year. So, it's doing those things and kind of blending them together and training [myself] this [is] okay...they can all work together. It's just you have to create the habit of doing it that way."

Maggie and Mike shared how interactions with Korean people or the Korean community offered opportunities to explore and develop their Korean identities. William said that his exposure to Korean people in college offered him the chance to be curious and seek answers about his Korean heritage. Parker noted his art during college offered the space to personally reflect and seek understanding about who he was. Samantha shared that questions about being a Korean adoptee initially started in seventh grade. Maggie described how she has struggled to make sense of and integrate aspects of herself when thinking about identity. Mike and William offered their experiences when exploring and blending identities in a way that could practically work for them.

The fluctuation and complexity of identity was highlighted within this group of Korean adoptees. In terms of identity exploration, change, and adaptability; participants in this sample offered a variety of different paths of how this occurred and continued over time. Mike noted his process of trying on identities seemed similar to trying on a lot of different shoes and seeing how they fit or matched for you. The participants'

socialization experiences with an assortment of people and encounters also represented how the environment can interact with what shoes are tried on and how much support is present when that occurred. For some of the participants, trying on different shoes did not only represent learning new information, but also the process of integrating that information in a way that made sense. This differentiation process from the White or American cultural norms, seemed to produce internal conflict and even continuous recycling of uncertainty within change. Trying on different shoes may have evoked similar questions for the participants that were initially asked as children. There appeared to be a concerted effort to continue exploring their choices of shoes, while also interfacing with their own doubts and beliefs about what they should or needed to look like.

Reactions to being a Korean Adoptee. Mike said, "Now I would say...I am special. There's not a lot of people that feel the same way I do and I can use my story to be a bridge to so many other people." Parker mentioned, "I think being a Korean adoptee or at least what it means to me is having the knowledge of coming from two different heritages or see different cultures." Moreover, Samantha spoke, "And once I started looking at [being a Korean adoptee] in more of a positive light, it really became who I am and I think proud is the perfect word of how I feel." While in Korea, Brett noted, "Being in Korea. The feeling of being a Korean adoptee...I did feel proud of the sense that all of us [referring to Korean adoptees] were from all around the world with many different experiences and coming to Korea."

Other participants noted contrasting experiences related to being a Korean adoptee. Abby noted her lack of medical history, "I think about oh if I ever got sick and I needed to know that or that would help to know. And I wouldn't have that [medical] history, oh, is there a history of heart disease? No, like I have high cholesterol and I don't know why." On more of an emotional level, Brett reported, "Well as I grow older, I realized that one of the drawbacks [that] was always there with me [was] the sort of feeling of emptiness." In addition to emptiness, William said, "So if I [have] to define how I feel about being a Korean adoptee is its complicated." Mike commented, "We kind of all face the same problems in the sense of, we're outnumbered…I feel like we all kind of share that same journey of not feeling like we belong in [this] land and we had to come [from] somewhere [else and] there's going to be plenty of people that don't think that we're worthy or that we're part of this country."

Brett and Samantha shared that being a Korean adoptee was special for them; while Mike answered that he is special. Parker noted a literal answer of being from two different cultures and heritages. Abby expressed how the absence of her medical history provoked worry about her health. Brett noted that being a Korean adoptee could be correlated with feeling empty, while William felt that being a Korean adoptee was complicated. Mike painted the picture that he was outnumbered in the United States and that he suggested his personal worthiness is a point of contention. The Korean adoptee experience seemed to reflect how personal and relational events interacted within multiple systems. The interviewees offered some positive reactions to being a Korean adoptee, like being able to understand and bridge multiple groups or cultures together, or feeling proud and special due to being a Korean adoptee. However, there interviews

seemed to generate negative reactions that reflected struggles with medical information access, feeling alone, and questioning their acceptability as a member of the overall American society. This section spotlighted the reactions and feelings associated with being a Korean adoptee and what these experiences were like.

Mental Health

The superordinate theme of mental health captured excerpts from all eight of the participants; these were organized into symptoms of *Anxiety* and *Depression*. Maggie noted struggling with several mental health diagnoses as a teenager:

> I was diagnosed with depression when I was 16. Anxiety, general anxiety, social anxiety, OCD. I was diagnosed with quite a few things when I was not super young...I don't think it's unreasonable to say that so much of those experiences [confronted with distress from being adopted or my physical appearance] contributed to that, especially my inability to even have an identity.

The subordinate themes of *Anxiety* and *Depression* included excerpts from participants who endorsed symptoms that fit within those diagnoses. These categories do not reflect any diagnoses that were derived from the interviews.

Anxiety. Seven of the participants noted symptoms that are typically associated with anxiety. Mike said, “When I meet new people, I do generally feel like I have to present the best version of myself. But that's how I am with everybody because of my social anxiety.” Anxiety was sometimes associated with social situations for Brett, “Especially when you don't know somebody, you never know if they're going to turn out to be a complete asshole or completely open. Now, so, yeah, there's some anxiety there. Yeah, I want to open this kind of worms...[but] how can that happen, but how [are] they

going to respond?" William also noted his experience with some anxiety when interacting with Korean adoptees, "Because it all happened in my head pretty quickly. And then realistically what happens is that probably I just asked more questions in those situations or a leading question to draw out more of their feelings on things and then once I have those things identified I know. Then socially, I have to do these things...so it happens pretty quickly."

In addition to anxiety within social settings, Parker recalled his experience with generalized anxiety, "I think that [when it comes to decision making] it created a lot of anxiety, which is not good...it makes me question a lot of things that I don't think need to be questioned. And then when I finally do come to a decision, I think it makes me question, okay, did you wait too long to make this decision or did you act too impulsively?" Parker added, "I would say that I [am] always anxious. Yeah, I don't know, it's just my anxiety levels are always kind of crazy and everything [I am] just always questioning all these things." Abby provided her experience with anxiety:

> It's always kind of in a state of I mean, fear, but more anxiety, you know, which I do have issues around. That's a big one for me. In my early 20s, I started having panic attacks and went to counseling and got treated for that. Constantly, I've definitely had [and] I would consider myself [to] have anxiety problems, anxiety issues and sometimes it's better, but I do sometimes have those panic attacks still. I live in a constant state of anxiety. I really think about it.

Mike and Brett noted social anxiety occurs when they interacted with other people. William implemented coping strategies when her experienced social anxiety as he connected with other Korean adoptees. Parker and Abby detailed their experiences

with facing a constant state of anxiety, for Parker it manifested in constantly questioning himself, while Abby noted a history of panic attacks. For each of the participants, the descriptions of anxiety and social anxiety ranged from very explicit to just naming symptoms or characteristics when they have occurred. Notably, the Korean adoptees provided descriptions of generalized anxiety along with anxiety that occurs within social settings. For social anxiety, it was interesting to notice if the symptoms stemmed from feeling judged or observed by others, and also how that may create difficulties with fitting in. Within the generalized anxiety descriptions, the overall anxiety stemmed from obstacles to feeling confident and secure with one's self and ability to enact choices. This may be difficult to combat when there were worries about personal safety, well-being, or stability that were initiated from their adoption and other socialization experiences. The severity and intensity levels may range, but there seemed to be a need for Korean adoptees to receive mental health support regarding symptoms of social and generalized anxiety.

Depression. Four of the participants noted symptoms of depression during the study. Maggie noted battling depression symptoms at different points of her life, including in college:

> I went to college and I tried to not have a therapist, which was a terrible choice, and became really suicidal. My depression worsened really really badly my second year of college. I isolated. I wasn't talking to anybody. I was sleeping all the time. I was skipping class. I was crying all the time and I became really suicidal and…I didn't have a plan. But I thought about it all the time, where I would be walking up the stairs and think, I could throw myself off the stairs. Or

walking down the street and think, I could jump in front of a car. It wasn't as specific as, I'm going to do this, but it was all-consuming.

Maggie also spoke about her current struggles, “I still have a lot of self-esteem and self-worth issues that I need to figure out, just in different areas... [for example] I never feel super confident at work.” Mike also noted instances of struggling with depression symptoms, “I would say the one that I definitely haven’t talked a lot about is more like my mental health. I think a lot of my depressive episodes when I was younger, and even now have a lot to do with the adoption story and how I dealt with it…I think I just also feel like I burden people and…I think a lot of it just comes back down to, I don't want to see them leave.” Samantha revealed depression that occurred during her childhood, “I was really just depressed for a really long time of not wanting to do things. And I just wanted to stay at home with my mom and my brother and stay with my family.” Ramona shared her opinion regarding coping with depression symptoms, “Those feelings [of loss and abandonment] will never go away and they have given me a great deal of depression that I subconsciously tuned out for a lot of my 20s. I just self-medicated and drank all the time.”

Maggie, Mike, and Ramona reportedly experienced symptoms of depression and also offered possible sources of the mental health symptoms. Samantha also said that she experienced chronic depression in her childhood. There appeared to be varying degrees of intensity, severity, and duration of depression symptoms identified by the participants. It was notable to hear the hypotheses about where the depression may come from and how the adoptees attempted to cope when it occurred. Ramona and Mike opened up about where the depression symptoms potentially originated, they thought they were

related to being abandoned along with feeling as a burden to others. Depression symptoms for Korean adoptees seemed to be an important consideration for children and adults within this community. Despite fewer people endorsing symptoms of depression than anxiety, it is still critical to showcase the potential need for mental health services with Korean adoptees regarding depression.

Minority Distress

The superordinate theme of *Minority Distress* covered instances that were related to visible and invisible identities. Also, the theme included general examples of feeling othered, invalidation from others regarding identity, interactions with the White or American cultural systems, along with overall coping styles. The primary subordinate themes that will be addressed were: *Feeling Othered*, *Distress Regarding Invisible Identities*, *Distress Regarding Visible Identities*, *Personal Invalidation*, *Impact of Living in a White or American Society*, and *Coping*.

Feeling othered. All eight of the Korean adoptees expressed reactions to feeling a lack of belonging or generally isolated based on their physical appearance. The sub themes were *Based on Race* and *Lack of Belonging*.

Based on race. Brett shared his opinion regarding attractiveness, “I think that's been a really big one for me because here [in the US] I really don't feel attractive. Because I don't receive attention. I didn't know what that kind of attention was like until I went to Korea and Japan or hung out with [other] Asians.” Mike noted, “I wasn't proud before a lot of it actually [had] to do with community...I was chasing the White community I wanted to fit in there…I was trying to fit into place.” Parker also reported, “I know that when I was younger. There [were] definitely more thoughts about a sense

of belonging...Why am I in this community where there's no Asians, or why don't I look like anybody?" William described a specific instance:

> Now it would have been the winter of 2016. And the reason I know that is because President Trump was just freshly elected. [I] had a meeting and then everybody went and had drinks at a bar afterwards and it was at a small-town bar in one of the neighboring towns and...normally [I] have no problem going into those places because...growing up here. I know how people just navigate culture, and I know the culture...it's part of who I am. I just navigate in and out of that's fine, it's just a way of life. Um, but that was the first time that I've ever gone into a place here where I live, where I was uncomfortable because of the way that I look. That [experience] felt like everybody was looking at me. This is literally the first time that has ever happened to me where I felt like that. We walked in and found a table. We sat down and I felt like all [the] eyes turned in. It's like an old Western, a cowboy from out of town walks in and everybody turns on their bar stools and their looking at this person. That didn't happen, nobody turned and looked me, but people shot a glance at me and [were thinking] who's this? That was a very uncomfortable situation.

Maggie shared one instance where her race was the basis for facing questions about her background:

> Actually, it just happened a couple weeks ago...I was at a store, and I was getting change from the guy, and he said, are you Japanese? And this is usually…it's either, what are you? Or they pick a random country and try to guess. And I said, no, not Japanese, and then he said, hmm, Chinese? And I said, no, I'm not

> Chinese and normally in the past, I would have been like, oh no, I'm Korean. But I...just wanted to buy whatever it was that I was buying and leave and I didn't want to have this conversation. So, I didn't give him that courtesy. I just said nope, not Chinese, and then he kept looking at me, and he wouldn't give me my money back until he had this [information], [after I still didn't reply] ...he was like, man. He did one of those…(shrugged) and I just kept looking at him, and I wasn't answering him. I wasn't going to give him my nationality, so he eventually gave up and was like, ah, and he gave me my money back. And I remember just feeling like, I just wanted to get my thing and go home. I didn't want to have this whole guessing game situation going on, which often is how it comes out.

Brett noted due to his race and gender he did not feel attractive until he went to a country in Asia or spent more time with other Asian people in the United States. Mike and Parker remembered problems with fitting into the White norms and community. William recalled a tense experience when he was sitting in a bar near his home and felt as though all of the eyes in the bar were watching him as if he was a cowboy from out of town. Maggie disclosed how she experienced harassment when a White male felt entitled to know her ethnicity when shopping at a store.

Within all of the examples, the norm was based on its alignment with White expectations. The Korean adoptees believed that their race and physical characteristics impacted how they were treated by others and felt about themselves based on the White standards. The participants suggested that acting within the White value and cultural systems occurred automatically, but still yielded isolation, unattractiveness, threat to safety, and harassment. However, being raised by White parents and White cultural

norms may predispose Korean adoptees to internalize those values and expectancies, despite a lack of physical resemblance or treatment outside of that system. Despite the discomfort, the Korean adoptees may be susceptible to adopting the White cultural norms and values because of the voids with feeling a sense of belonging and connection to their race, Korean ethnicity, heritage, and culture.

Lack of belonging. Mike shared, “I would say it was difficult more from the fact that I just didn't know where I belonged. And I think all [of the] kids just wanted to find a place where people accepted them for who they were and who they are.” This seemed common for Ramona as well, “What I'm trying to get at is that...I've always felt like I'm on my own little island as an adoptee. I've always felt like I'm in my own little [bubble]. Yeah, like I've never fully fit in with one group or another.” Samantha remembered an experience as a child:

> So, when I was younger, the town I grew up in is almost 80% German so we have German festivals four times a year, and everyone gets really into those because that's the culture of the town I grew up in. So, I grew up wishing that I was like them, that I knew what I was celebrating and it was a part of my heritage…I knew I wasn't like them and I wanted to fit in a little better.

Maggie said:

> In college, my freshman year, I tried to join the Asian American Club because I was like, oh, there’re other Asian people here! So, I went in the hopes of trying to find other Asian people, and they all kind of grouped off together and the Indian people were together, the Pakistani people were together, the Chinese people were together. The Filipino people were together, and they were all having these little

conversations about, oh, does your family…you know, when your family, blah blah blah, or when this holiday comes, or when this thing comes, and I didn't…I wasn't able to talk to anybody about anything...but I never went back to that club because I felt like I did not belong there.

Mike shared that he struggled finding a place where he belonged and was accepted by others. Ramona utilized the image of an island when describing her attempts to fit in with other people. Samantha and Ramona noted attempts to assimilate with a German festival and Asian American club respectively; they reported unsuccessful attempts with fitting in. The adoptees in these examples noted barriers to feeling a sense of belonging or connectedness during childhood and as adults. For the participants, identifying as Korean, Asian, and an adoptee, while also being raised in a White family may create situations where it was difficult for Korean adoptees to find peers and community with similar experiences. The image of being on an island, stranded, and surrounded by water creates a strong image of not only isolation, but also helplessness to affect change. These feelings may be attributed from feeling rejected, abandoned, or relinquished. Korean adoptees may have felt that it was not fruitful enough to find ways off the island and pursue relationships with individuals, groups, and communities. These experiences reflected how the interviewees struggled to feel accepted and understood.

Distress regarding invisible identities. Seven of the eight participants noted instances of minority distress related to one or more invisible identities. Brett described:

I'm aware that [other people] might think that I'm inferior [because I'm adopted]. For example, when I was in Japan my Japanese girlfriend at the time told me, oh, when you talk to people, don't tell them that you're adopted because they're going

to look down on you…Yeah, definitely feeling othered like I was outside the Japanese society and would be looked down on. But I think that's actually the strongest feeling of being othered.

Maggie also shared an instance of facing a bully when she was in elementary school, "I mean, there was the one time with my bully [in elementary school] that I think I mentioned last time, but other than that, no one's ever singled me out for being an adoptee...he was the only person that I can think of who specifically said you suck because you're adopted. I do really hate the adopted jokes." Ramona noted a time when she faced comments related to being adopted:

> I was like, oh, this will be a really cool opportunity to join an Asian or Korean sorority or get into that and really be connected, but I ended up finding that I felt even more left out from them, too. Because these [Korean] girls approached me and they said, oh, what's your name? And I said my name and they asked me. And this was on the first day of school and I cried, but they asked me, oh, why is your name, that? And I was just like, well, I was adopted from Korea and the girl responded. Oh, I'm so sorry…it was very apparent that I wasn't one of them.

Parker shared a different example of the heteronormative bias he endured when spending time with his adoptive sister:

> [My adoptive sister and I] were at Blockbuster renting a movie…I think [at age] 13 or something. And then the cashier...we were fighting over who was going to pay because neither [of us wanted] to pay for it. And then so I finally was like, okay I guess I'll have to pay for [it].

> The cashier was like, look, the guy always has to pay for it when he's on a date and I was uhhhh. Damn, that's my sister (laughs). And the cashier was, okay, I'm sorry, but I think that's one of my earliest memories of it.

Brett, Maggie, and Ramona shared different marginalizing experiences that reinforced the notion that being an adoptee meant they were less than. Parker also described an example of heteronormative bias when he was discussing with his adoptive sister who should pay for the movie. These two examples highlighted how the outside perception of being a Korean adoptee may contrast with the person's internalized experience or self-identification. When those initially hidden aspects of identity were revealed, they may have created situations where there was confusion, ridicule, or even conflict. From the retelling of their stories, these memories of feeling lambasted for being an adoptee or gay represented memorable moments. It is easy to hypothesize that continuous messages from other individuals, groups, communities, or cultures that deem certain invisible identities as negative may inhibit a Korean adoptees' ability to find others who will accept them. Also, Korean adoptees may choose to keep certain marginalized identities hidden to protect themselves from personal distress.

Distress regarding visible identities. Seven of the eight Korean adoptees noted instances of minority distress stemming from their physical appearance. The sub themes were *Racism* and *Stereotyped*.

Racism. Abby noted a distinct moment:

> The first time I experienced a negative reaction to being Korean was being in a store by myself and I was probably young (pause), maybe 11 or 12 and an old man came up to me.

[He] was very angry and he started yelling at me, telling me to go back to where I came from and just was very mean. And I had no idea how to react. I didn't have anybody with [me, no] friends or [family].

Maggie also shared an experience as a teenager:

I remember telling my [adoptive] mom, because we met at a mutual friend's sweet 16 party, and he was super nice. And he only wanted to talk to me the whole night. And so…it was very flattering, and I remember telling my [adoptive] mom about it, and I remember him saying something about how he only liked Asian girls. I remember that. And I remember thinking, that's weird, why would you only like Asian girls? Why wouldn't you just like girls in general?"

Ramona described what occurred at a fifth-grade talent show:

Well (pause) when I was in fifth grade...there was this talent show. Where some of the guys that went to my school got up and did the Asian eyes (gestured) and were pulling their face back and running around and that was definitely one experience that I felt like was just outright ignorance and that was making fun of me for being Asian, especially because I was like the only Asian kid at the school.

Samantha referred to an example that also occurred at school, "I remember in middle school; I would get a B on a test and my friends would all joke you're a Bsian not an Asian and it's just one of those things where…I grew up having to deal with [it] and especially since my town is mostly German. It's just when you get a minority in that community it really does stand out."

The Korean adoptees in the sample noted instances of racism and racist acts that included name calling, gestures, questioning their national origin, and even fetishes around being an Asian woman. These acts were solely based on the physical appearance of the participants in the sample. These exemplars also pointed to not only the racist behavior, but also the lack of support or protection when they occurred. The cultural and social messages in the United States for Asians and more specifically Koreans reinforce the narrative that certain races or skin tones are acceptable or not. These overarching systems of norms permeate communities and individuals who then displace those labels and categories onto Korean adoptees. Moreover, the forms and instances of distress stemming from minority physical identities for Korean adoptees may be inescapable. Moreover, if there are not concrete steps taken by adoptive parents, then their children may feel powerless when faced with distress and isolated due to their appearance.

Stereotyped. Ramona provided an example, “Someone made a comment to me in recent years that Asian people are bad drivers.” Parker disclosed an incident that occurred in his local neighborhood, “I did not like going to a part of town [where I live] because the last time I was there, I was dating somebody and I brought some food. And I was waiting outside for him and someone thought that I was a Chinese delivery man. And I was like, oh my God that's so embarrassing and no!” Maggie offered an example of stereotyping:

> I was going food shopping, and I was with my ex, and we were walking in the parking lot going into the building, and this lady stopped us. And she was like, oh, you're so pretty. And I said, oh, thank you, okay. Um, and she said, you know, my son started dating an Asian person. And I said, oh, good for him. And

> she says, you people are so polite! She takes her shoes off when she comes into the house, and I always tell her she doesn't have to do that, but she's so polite. She insists that she has to! And I mean, I literally don't have anything to say at this point. And then she talks to my ex about me like I can't understand her. I don't remember what she said, but she said certain things about my people, but won't talk to me. She won't look at me. She won't directly talk to me. She's only talking to him. And then she said, you make a beautiful couple and walked away. And I'm like, I just wanted to go food shopping. I just wanted to get my food and go home…I didn't want to have this today.

Ramona and Maggie offered examples of how being identified as Asian by others are quickly tied to generalizations about all Asian people. For Parker's example, the image of an Asian person holding food in a bag automatically grouped him into the definition of being a Chinese delivery driver. Not only were these stereotypes identified, but they were also communicated to each of the Korean adoptees. These and other stereotypes disregard the person's actual identity exploration or actualization. The categorization of certain groups ignores the concept of within-group differences for social and cultural groups. Also, these rules and norms represent how groups who hold power attempt to label, marginalize, and highlight minority groups simply based on visible identities. The ironic part for Korean adoptees is this phenomenon may be incongruent with each person's individual or group identity identification. However, the individual's self-identification is nullified when there are broad stereotypes that attempt to negate the individual differences within certain populations.

Personal Invalidation. Six of the eight Korean adoptee participants recalled instances of personal invalidation. Maggie shared an altercation that happened between her and her adoptive mother after returning from Korea:

> [I] remember during one fight, she said, well, you only were there for 17 days; you've lived here your whole life. Why doesn't this feel like home to you? And I remember not being able to explain it to her and then just getting angry and upset and just yelling at her. And being very hurt by her comment at the same time, because it was so trivializing and dismissive of what I was struggling with.

Abby also provided a personal experience:

> You know people when they find out [about birth searches]. Oh, [they say] your life is so great, you should just be grateful that you have what you have. And now, why does that matter [referring to a birth search]? And so, I tend to question myself and it's been really challenging because my [adoptive] sister is one of those people. She's like, why are you so focused on [having] so many issues about that and [she says] just be grateful for what you know.

William noted:

> I would have been (pause) seven or eight years old, and it was Christmas Day at my grandparents' house and...we had just finished opening all of our Christmas presents as a family...my paternal grandparents and so I was with my family. [I] was there and all my uncles and aunts and all my cousins were there...we're all playing with our stuff that we just opened.

> And one of my cousins said, you're not really part of the family because you were adopted and now that bothers me a lot. Then, it was grandma...he told me that I'm not part of the family because I'm adopted.

Maggie reported an instance of invalidation that occurred from her adoptive mother when there was a recalibration of what home was. For Abby she noted disparaging comments from her adoptive sister about her choice to pursue a birth search. William's cousin refuted his standing within the family simply because he was adopted. From these stories, the sources of personal invalidation were family members, including an adoptive mother and sister. These instances represented when one person feels emboldened to tell the adoptee what to feel, think, or do. The invalidation was paired with the message that the adoptee was insignificant and their experiences do not matter. These and other examples of invalidation contributed to the adoptee feeling dismissed, bothered, and even questioning themselves about the validity of their choices and opinions. It seems possible that hearing these reactions from family members, who are supposed to love and care about you could hold greater significance or be long-lasting. Without counter narratives and alternative sources of support, the impact of invalidating experience can be the loudest thing that is felt and internalized by the Korean adoptee.

Impact of White or American society. This theme attempted to address the implicit messages received by Korean adoptees when they lived within a White or American society. Six of the eight individuals noted this occurred for them. Brett described, "It's self-othering, so maybe that is part of [what] feeds into the depression or sadness I felt having to leave Korea that first time coming back to the White-only society." Mike elaborated on the impact of living in a White world:

> All the masculine figures that I saw in my life, not only in my personal life, but also on the big screen in entertainment were all just White men. They had these chiseled jaws. They had it look a certain way, didn't have my eyes [and they] looked completely different from me. So, the images that I was receiving to be a man [was] you had to look like that [and] you had to be like that.

Parker also spoke about this phenomenon from his perspective, "I think a lot of [integrating parts of myself] ...a lot of it had to do with body image and everything just based off of the American standards of what people are supposed to look like. And it was one of those [times] where I finally accepted the fact that you are not going to look like these people ever because you're not these people." Sometimes the messaging around the White or American norms were shared by adoptive parents to their children, Maggie noted, "I remember telling my [adoptive] mom [about what the boy said in terms of only liking Asian girls], and I remember her saying, well, maybe he thinks you're exotic, [she's since apologized…for presenting it like that.] And I remember telling her, but why? Like nothing, nothing about me is like that, though. I grew up in New York."

Brett noted that living in a White or an American cultural world meant feeling that it was self-othering, particularly after he traveled back from Korea. For Mike and Parker, they described their experiences of receiving messages about the idealized body images and standards. Maggie described an instance when her adoptive mother described her as exotic. The participants offered reactions and experiences that represented awareness of their current or past interactions with White or American cultural norms and definitions of acceptability. Using the example from Parker, these direct comparisons with idealized images from White America highlighted discrepancies for these

individuals. The Korean adoptees still attempted to compare themselves with American or White society; when those standards were unable to be met, the internalization process of what good or attractive is occurred. The inability to solve the discrepancy between the image on the pedestal and their own self-image contributed to feeling othered. Specifically, for Maggie, these comparisons and definitions were not only implicitly observed, but explicitly expressed by her adoptive mother. The word exotic inherently means that it is not familiar and does not fit the mold of what is normative. It may be expected that being socialized within a White and American household would dictate that those norms and prototypes represent the comparison points for Korean adoptees.

Coping. All of the participants shared how they have or currently cope with instances of minority distress. The sub themes within *Coping* are *Negative Reactions* and *Positive Reactions*.

Negative reactions. Abby remembered following the incident at the store where she was told to go back from where she came from:

> So, I definitely have that sense of I'm embarrassed. I feel remorse. I felt ashamed like I had done something wrong. Even though I hadn't…I had to walk away with that I didn't. I remember I hadn't told my [adoptive] mom about that. [I] told her a couple years ago. Because I remember I didn't tell anybody because I was so embarrassed. I didn't want to talk about that. I wanted to pretend it didn't happen.
>
> Mike also noted:
>
> I think most the time, they kind of festered on me and I would get angry about [questions about my adoption] later on, and I get frustrated because I didn't know how to explain them.

> So, it did lead to a lot of negative feelings kind of about myself [when I wasn't able to answer questions about my adoption] and being othered again. So, I don't think that was healthy for me, but that's just what I did.

Parker also demonstrated frustration, “I think that [being passed over for promotions] just raised questions of, why is this? Because it [is happening] being a Korean was definitely a factor into the thought process of, am I getting passed over because of who I am? So, do I need to try harder than [other people] to be able to prove that I can do these jobs, which I think totally sucks?” Maggie shared:

> I never knew how to unpack those experiences and my [adoptive] parents never went through anything like that because they're White. So, they didn’t necessarily know how to unpack it in the most effective way. They would just be sympathetic and listen to what I would say if I decided to tell them, but they couldn't tell me how to deal with it or how to let it go or how to process it, you know? I was very much just on my own in that regard.

Ramona also seemed to note how disappointing it was for her, “I can talk about the emotional [experience] for me [when I interacted with those Korean girls in college] ...it was really disappointing for me. I just assumed that things would be easier...I would just automatically feel a sense of identity and...here was a big chance for me to fit in.

But it seemed harder, it seemed like it definitely hurt my feelings." Samantha seemed to take a different approach, "Growing up, that's what I had to deal with [being called a Bsian when I got a B in middle school] and at the time I never wanted to make a big deal about it, even though it definitely hurt my feelings and made me wish I was more normal and more White and more American." William also seemed to take a stance of avoiding or minimizing:

> [Following the event that happened at the bar in 2016 I was] so uncomfortable in the sense that [I was] concerned about my own well-being and safety…quite frankly, I don't frequent those places like that [bar in 2016] anymore. I don't put myself in those situations. I know where those people are so I don't go there. I pass when there are things that I could go to or meet [up] with people…I don't put myself in that situation.

Brett recalled a sense of fear, "Not overtly, but there's always a feeling in my gut, there's always the feeling in my heart that oh, I'm gonna have to tell them I'm adopted, and they're going to look at me differently because of it."

Abby recalled that she hid what occurred at the store from everyone, including her adoptive parents. Mike noted feeling othered and frustrated when he was unable to answer or stop questions regarding his adoption. Parker also discussed instances where he thought being a Korean was related to not being promoted. When confronted with minority distress, Maggie shared that her adoptive parents would listen, but she felt they were ill-equipped to react or process those experiences when they occurred. Ramona noted after interacting with the Korean girls in college that she felt disappointed and hurt when she was rejected from the opportunity to socialize in that sorority because of being

an adoptee. Samantha also felt hurt after being called names based on stereotypes, but like Abby she chose to minimize the impact of those events. William disclosed that he avoided putting himself in situations where he may face distress related to his visible identities. Brett added that he attempted to shield himself from disclosing that he is an adoptee, due to fears of facing ridicule from others.

The Korean adoptees offered a variety of ways they attempted to cope with instances of minority distress. These included minimizing, avoiding, internalizing self-beliefs, fear, and feeling a lack of support or protection. Moreover, none of the adoptees seemed to feel confident or supported when attempting to cope with these instances in an adaptive or healthy way. Learning more about these coping strategies could be vitally important for clinicians who are seeking to understand the impact of minority distress within this population. These examples suggested that without the ability to process and receive help from others, Korean adoptees may internalize these distressing experiences. It seems critically important to explore how minority distress can impact Korean adoptees through individual, group, and societal messaging.

Positive Reactions. Brett noted, "It just feels like a useful bit of information to know if I'm in Japan and there might be some pretty negative consequences if I talk about being adopted. And so it's, a fine line that I have found somehow." Maggie shared, "I started understanding the world more and how unkind it could be and how racist it could be. I started understanding how that would really affect me." William increased his awareness:

There was a very heavily race focused leadership conference. So, there was a lot of race discussions and I was sitting through [a] particularly intense session and it was an improv group, which is called Breaking Ice. And what they did is they improv'd all of this implicit bias and this systemic racism and all of these things that have basically been playing out in front of my eyes…without ever looking for [or] looking at or needing to acknowledge I avoided [and] I disregarded.

Parker shared a moment where he received support from a friend and identified self-acceptance:

I just remember having a long conversation with one of my friends about…the standards of [being] Americanized. What is appealing or what the standards are like in media and magazines [are]? They were like, you have to understand that's a person that you won't be...therefore it's okay to not strive to be that… [Parker responded] I think that's when it dawned on me…I won't ever look like that. This is not going to be physically possible. So it's like, you can't hold yourself to the standards [of] something that you won't be and I think that's where my self-acceptance came in.

This seemed to be salient as well for Ramona, "[After that experience with the Korean college students it] made me want to associate with a bunch of different people...a bunch of different races and a bunch of different types of people in my friend group because I could just be me and be different." Samantha shared the importance of receiving support:

> When I was in elementary school, I definitely remember you did not want to tattle tale on people and different things like that and so I never wanted to say anything [if I got teased because of my race]. And my [adoptive] parents would always say [if] this is something that's bothering you, you have to say something. And my [adoptive] parents are always the most supportive people and they always saw exactly what I was going through and that was kind of how I coped with it. My [adoptive] parents were my biggest support system and that definitely helped a lot.

Brett said that having information about potential instances of minority distress was valuable to prepare himself when he was traveling in Japan. Maggie through personal experience and William from seeing a skit appeared to cope with minority distress by increasing personal awareness to forms and mechanisms of oppression. Ramona and Parker commented on the idea of self-acceptance and how that strategy could be implemented by developing a genuine connection with self and others. Samantha reported how coping with minority distress can be alleviated when she felt support from her adoptive parents. These participants named examples of how undergoing minority distress could be helpful. The intrapersonal and interpersonal techniques that were named, included: self-acceptance, preparation, increasing awareness, and receiving support. Unlike the negative reactions, there were no examples of negative self-beliefs or personal questioning that took place. Despite the occurrence of minority distress, the participants showed signs of being able to overcome potentially difficult or distressing circumstances by demonstrating adaptive skills, strategies, and techniques.

Participant Values

The superordinate theme of *Participant Values* discussed the values noted by the participants within individual, relational or both contexts. The primary sub themes were *Personal*, *Relational*, and *With Self and Others*

Personal. Seven of the eight participants noted personal values during the interview process. The sub themes were *Accomplishing Goals* and *Work Ethic*.

Accomplishing goals. Abby reported, "I run a very efficient household. I take pride in that, you know (laughs). And I think as much as it might sometimes drive my husband crazy, I do think he knows that it keeps our house in order." Parker noted, "I've come to terms with the fact that I don't think I'll ever sell art or make money off of it. But I don't know, it's just [the] satisfaction of seeing my artwork up on the wall and that it's out there for people to see." Ramona added, "I want to work and I want to create work and contribute to the world [through music] and I want [to] make the most out of what I can bring." This sense of giving back also was shared by William, "Maybe [the Korean cultural and language center] starts to change the way that rural America looks at the color of people again and starts to actually understand it and we can start to work on some of these broader systemic issues that we have."

Abby described her motivation to try and keep the chores and responsibilities around the house in order. William noted how he prioritized enacting change on community and systemic levels. Parker and Ramona reported the importance of creating and completing forms of art and expression. It was intriguing to notice that the value of accomplishing goals stemmed from micro tasks, forms of art, and macro level change. Moreover, all of the forms of completing and finalizing tasks included the involvement of

others; Abby's family, general audiences of art for Ramona and Parker, along with people of color in rural areas for William. Along with the completion of an expectation, the values seemed related to impacting others when the work was accomplished. I wonder if these values reflect personal and meaningful goals that also represented genuine ways of expressing themselves with others. These opportunities may present mechanisms for adoptees to feel intrinsic gratification and extrinsic validation for their effort and work.

Work ethic. Abby identified, "I very much believe that what you put in is what you get out, so you know the harder you work, the more you will get back." Ramona said, "And my dad he came from nothing but made himself and [he] did all the hard work to get there and I totally respect it. And I think it's the greatest thing in the world when people are self-made." Samantha explained, "I just like to spend my time doing things that are productive…And I like to really know what I can accomplish and strive to push the boundaries."

Abby, Ramona, and Samantha expressed the importance of having a strong work ethic even if it meant overcoming potential obstacles and hardship. These qualities could also be described as determination, perseverance, and maintaining a high level of effort. In the quotes, there were qualities that suggested secondary values of independence, breaking preconceived expectations, and rewards for continuing to work hard. Regardless of the reason, these participants described how continuing to work hard was personally meaningful and a strong motivator to continue their value-driven behaviors.

Relational. Seven of the Korean adoptees also offered examples of relational values. The two sub themes were named *Caring* and *Relationships*.

Caring. Maggie shared, "When I first thought of value, the first word that came to mind was being empathetic, which I definitely think was shaped through my negative and positive experiences." Brett also shared, "I really want to put myself in another person's shoes so that if I do anything, it's not going to make them feel bad, or I mean that's one aspect of it…I guess just being really sensitive to what I think are other people's feelings and [also] being able to portray that say in a video is really appealing to me." Ramona reported, "I want to help people through music, whether that means just making them smile or sharing something or feel a certain emotion when they hear music." Mike said, "I'm a caring person, but in a sense of that I really want people to succeed and...want everybody to be happy and be successful."

In terms of the relational value of caring, Maggie and Brett discussed how important attuning to the emotional feelings of others was to them. Broadly, Mike expressed a genuine interest and wish that others experience success and are satisfied with their endeavors. Ramona and Brett shared the importance of utilizing the medium of music or photography to facilitate the expression of affect. Overall, caring about others was also attached to the welfare of others. Maggie was the only one who explicitly linked personal experiences with her value of caring about others. The attunement to others' well-being and emotions are altruistic values towards other people. There appeared to be a juxtaposed link between valuing others with the altercations where the needs and wants of the Korean adoptees in the sample were neglected or invalidated. These values may also symbolically constitute what was missing or absent

throughout their lives. These aspirations noted by the participants may have represented a dualistic process of what they want and strive for within interpersonal connections; along with what they wish they would have received or had been a part of.

Relationships. Broadly, Abby described, "The connections, the relationships I do have are very important to me. You know my relationship with my husband, the relationship with my [adoptive] sister, the relationship with my kids those are the really important to me. And I think those fill me up [and] make me happy." Similar to Abby, Samantha added, "Once you find a group of people you really connect with it's like the most beautiful thing in the world, it's just you fall in love with these people. And you try to spend as much time with them as possible." Despite personal struggles, Mike noted, "It's uncomfortable [to interact with different people], it's painful to go out and do that with other people and it's very scary. And it's easy to be fearful of something like that but I tried to do that [to] the best of my ability, every day, just because I think that's kind of what I'm inclined towards and what I care about. In a different way, Brett shared, "If I have any stories to tell through a camera. I think maybe the emotion, the feeling of human connection [and] connecting with feelings I want to express [that] through to the camera."

Abby noted that the relationships she has with certain family members are incredibly important to her and lead her to feel happy. Samantha and Mike shared how they both care about connecting with people and described their willingness to devote time towards those endeavors. Brett also reported the importance of connecting with people and portraying emotion through the camera. The overall takeaway from the adoptees in this theme was the emphasis on the value and personal importance of having

meaningful relationships and connections with others. Abby seemed to equate spending time with important people to filling a glass of water or a tank of gas; with the container becoming heavier and complete with each instance. For Brett, film offered a strong value in emotional expression and creating images that captured connected moments. The experiences suggested that there was a strong push toward capturing and storing those moments through the use of say a camera, while also valuing the importance of co-creating the moment with others. Moreover, the value of nurturing or cultivating those links seemed to be intrinsically rewarding, as if a symbolic cup is being continuously filled during and after those exchanges occur. It seems understandable that Korean adoptees would value relationships, particularly with knowing what it feels like to be isolated, misunderstood, and different. Also, it appears relevant that for Korean adoptees the initial relationship between them and their birth parents was severed and for most in the sample never repaired. These and other factors could influence Korean adoptee's pursuit of developing and growing social relationships because they represent intrinsic satisfaction and meaningfulness.

With self and others. Seven of the eight Korean adoptees from the sample provided values that included intrapersonal and interpersonal examples. The sub themes for this category were *Open and Non-Judgmental* and *Transparency and Authenticity*

Open and non-judgmental. Samantha shared her approach towards others, "I think…that's really important to me is that (pause) I try to see the best in people…I try to be very understanding that everyone has different experiences."

Maggie noted, “Being open-minded is a big value for me.” Ramona added, “I try to stay humble and just have a good attitude towards others and about life. I don’t think I’m better than anyone for any reason.”

Samantha noted that she values the process of trying to understand other people’s experiences. Maggie commented on how she cares about being open towards herself and others. Ramona also reported that having humility and being curious about others’ backgrounds and her life were characteristics she strived towards. The participants offered personal principles they utilize when approaching themselves and others with a sense of openness, attempting to be curious and non-judgmental. The values noted by the Korean adoptees may also be a reflection of their personal wants and needs for themselves and people around them. These aspirations could represent what they want or need from others and themselves in their own lives. Korean adoptees’ attitudes conveyed their sensitivity, receptiveness, and invitation towards learning about themselves and others in an unassuming and exploratory way.

Transparency and authenticity. Abby noted her experience as a mother to adoptive children:

> Should I not be doing that because that's transferring my experience onto them...I don't want to do that, because everybody's experience is different...There are definitely aspects of [being an adoptee and mother that] become a very big aspect of how I parent that dilemma…And trying to also not assume [it is adoption] and some of it is due to [being] teenagers or they're just kids and that’s what kids do. And I don't want to create something that's not there or again transfer my

experiences onto them, but I also think it would be very rare for being adopted, whether you're Korean or otherwise [to] not [have that] affect your relationship.

Mike offered, “I believe strongly in all honesty, just because honesty...has a lot to do with trust...I just think that people should try to be as honest as they can with each other…that's what honesty is about, just being true to yourself and being true to others as well.” Ramona reflected, “I gravitate towards people that have or [are] going through a similar process as me or maybe…they are doing something that's really meaningful or they're trying to put something out there to share with the world, and whether it's the music or the art or their, whatever it is.”

Abby was willing to be open and transparent about her process with noticing how her personal experience as an adoptee may impact her parenting approach with her adopted children. Mike added that he values the importance of being honest with himself and people around him; he suggested it’s also associated with establishing trust. Ramona also reported being drawn towards people who sought to express themselves in ways that were similar to her; personally meaningful or significant. Reflection and honesty seemed to be the words that stuck out within this sub theme. The examples offered by the participants explicitly symbolized the congruence between individual and interpersonally-focused values. The participants expressed sincerity.

There was a consistent pattern with each adoptee identifying the importance of being aware, honest, and true to themselves. Ramona and Brett shared how their personal values were also applied to expressing their truest self with other people. Abby established how being reflective as a parent was directly linked with the well-being of her adoptive children. The participants noted how critical it was to attune to their own values

and how they were consistently translated to their approach and behavior in interpersonal contexts. Noticing these values of genuineness and transparency seemed particularly interesting when considering that Korean adoptees in the sample were missing accurate information about their birth family; experienced obstacles to finding their true selves-balancing being born in Korea, adopted, and raised in the United States; and personal difficulties with feeling included and accepted. Despite these challenges, the Korean adoptees still prioritized humility and values-based decisions.

Reactions to Participation

The superordinate theme of *Reaction to Participation* contained excerpts from the Korean adoptees, who addressed their reactions to the overall research study and to me specifically. All eight of the Korean adoptees offered some reflection and reaction to their participation. I thought it was important to disclose how they felt or thought about their experience as participants. The primary sub themes are *Reaction to General Participation* and *Specific Reaction to Me*.

Reaction to general participation. Six of the Korean adoptees offered overall reactions to being a member of the research study. Abby commented, “It's good for me. I appreciate it. I feel like it was a mini therapy session for me having to really think about all these things in a very condensed period of time.” Brett said, “Yeah, it feels good to have a chance to talk about, to articulate these things, and think about them, and to feel listened too. So, it feels like it's such a good thing that I'm wondering if there is some mechanism for it to happen as kind of [a] service for other adoptees?”

Parker shared, “I was just so excited to do the interview…[and] yeah it was pretty fun. Samantha commented, “I think that [the interview process] was really good. I liked that you sent me the questions before[hand] and I really had time to think about them and kind of come up with different things beforehand a little bit and yeah, it's just a really good experience.” Mike reflected on his experience, “I feel very satisfied at the end of this. I don't feel like I've left anything on the table. I feel like I've really given it everything, but I am appreciative of what you do in your work. And I just hope that my story can illuminate other people's lives, whether through research or whether through just allowing...[adoptees] to speak on and letting them process that on their own.

Ramona offered her reaction, “I think the biggest thing that came to light for me was...I kind of went into this thinking, oh I know who I am and you know I'm this person, but I think something that actually came to light for me was while I was talking is there's still stuff that I don't really know [about] who I am…I was questioning [that] in my head.”

Abby and Brett commented on the value of having to think about their own experiences with adoption and the benefit of having a validating space to express their stories. Parker spoke about how excited he was to have this opportunity, while Samantha complimented the interview process. Mike also shared that he felt very satisfied with what he contributed during the interviews and he hoped that the information could benefit the experiences of other Korean adoptees. Ramona revealed that the interview process highlighted parts of herself that were unfamiliar or still hidden.

Overall, there seemed to be an enthusiasm and appreciation for having a space to disclose personal thoughts, feelings, and actions. Each answer represented different pieces of the interview process that stood out to the participants. Having a space to speak about their experience and to feel heard was critically important for this group, they had reactions of excitement, appreciation, and satisfaction. Also, their responses reflected a strong ability to introspect and willingness to express their experiences with me. Participating in the interviews appeared to contrast the self-reported incidences of invalidation, minimization, or other forms of oppression the participants had undergone in the past. It was interesting that there were not any critical or constructive comments about the research study or interview process. Empowering each adoptee to share their stories was a critical component to collecting, reviewing, and then disseminating the content.

Specific reaction to me. Five of the members in the sample offered specific comments or reactions to me in regards to their experience in the research study. Brett spoke about the environment, “I'm thinking, yeah you really did make a safe. I thought, safe and comfortable in answering these questions and the way that you acted and responded and listened so that's my feedback.” Ramona shared, “I mean you are great and you're very nice and very easy to talk to. And I felt like I could tell you anything.” Maggie offered her reaction to me:

> I really appreciate you being patient while I talk about things I don't remember talking about because my train of thought is just constantly moving and in weird directions. So, I appreciate that you just kind of listened and didn't interrupt…I've never done this kind of thing so, it's been a really interesting experience for me,

being able to talk about things that I don't often talk about or haven't talked about in a long time, or don't really think about, even, on a daily basis. But you've been just very patient and you present a very safe space, which I think was what you were intending and hoping for. But you definitely you do present that and give that, as well so mission accomplished on that.

Separate from the actual interview process, William also noted the importance of the research, "I greatly appreciated your time. I greatly appreciated you doing this research. I think this is very important research to be done. I think that you do a really good job of conducting the research; you do a very good job of not leading and leaving bias out of the conversation so I commend you on that."

Brett, Ramona, and Maggie noted the facilitation of a safe space and also feeling comfortable to speak about their experiences. William commented on how I conducted the interview and feeling as though I tried to bracket my bias from the conversation. Moreover, none of the Korean adoptees supplied constructive feedback toward me when referencing their participation in the interview process. For this project to be successful, I attempted to co-develop a space that was warm, validating, and inviting for all of the participants. Moreover, I believed that being a Korean adoptee also assisted with relatability and building initial trust with each of the participants. I found it pivotal to establish that the space was safe and comfortable, particularly to differentiate myself from other instances when the Korean adoptees felt as though their stories were misunderstood, unimportant, or meaningless. I also wanted to form a trusting and authentic relationship with each of the participants so they knew who I was and my intention behind completing the research study. I was extremely humbled to hear

feedback about their involvement in the study. Although there were no examples of constructive feedback, I do wonder if the participants would have felt comfortable enough to share that with me following the end of both interviews.

The feedback from the participants seemed relevant for conducting future interviews with this population, there was a strong emphasis on establishing elements of safety and comfort. Moreover, the personal feedback reinforced the benefits and significance of using first-person qualitative methods when conducting research. The Korean adoptees described the helpfulness and personal meaning they felt when sharing their stories and experiences with me through the interviews. The co-development of a trusting relationship and interaction with all of the participants was personally and professionally important. It was necessary to remain open and curious about the experiences of the Korean adoptees to demonstrate a humility and willingness to learn about their stories.

Relationships

The superordinate theme of *Relationships* was extremely broad covering relationships with adoptive family and birth family. This theme also described Korean adoptees' experiences regarding interpersonal connections with other adult adoptees, ethnic and racially diverse groups, Korean people and the country of Korea itself. The primary sub themes included: *Relationship with Adoptive Family*, *Relationship with Birth Family*, *Relationship with Other Adoptees*, *Relationship with Ethnically and Racially Diverse Groups*, *Relationship with Korean People*, and *Relationship with Korea*.

Relationship with adoptive family. All eight of the participants provided described their relationship with adoptive family members. The primary sub themes included experiences with *Adoptive Parents* and *Adoptive Siblings*.

Adoptive parents. Maggie shared a reaction about her adoptive parents concerning adoption, "They were just like, here's your kid; rear them like they're White! That's basically the advice they were given, so they were not prepared for and neither was I of course for what sort of struggles I would go through." William struggled to communicate with his adoptive mother:

> Specifically, my mom. Her body language, the rest of her body language was concerned, and I believe that she was concerned in the fact that she would no longer be my mom if I found my biological mother. Which isn't the fact, which I have been reiterating the fact, your my mom. But I don't know if she believes that will be the case at the end if, I were to find my biological family.

Samantha had a difficult experience with her adoptive mother as a teenager:

> I think a huge challenge I went through growing up [was] I was always told one story that my [birth] mom wasn't married and that she was a waitress and she couldn't afford to support a kid. And that's what I grew up thinking until I was 15, I think. And then when I was 15, my [adoptive] parents [thought] I was old enough [to know the truth and] they had found out other information and that wasn't really what was going on with my birth family…it was like one of those things where I felt I'd been lied to my whole life.

The participants also shared beneficial and positive reactions about their adoptive parents in regards to their adoption. Maggie shared, "[My adoptive family and I] still celebrate my adoption day. We'll go out as a family to lunch or dinner. My [adoptive] parents write very beautiful cards and kind of say the same thing over and over again, but it's always heartfelt." Mike said, "[My adoptive parents] are still open. They're so honest that they wanted me to even figure out my own truth. And that's a form of honesty in my opinion, just being transparent with the whole process, taking me to Korea and doing all these things." Generally, Ramona noted, "I think just my upbringing was a big part of it. I think just because it was so open and adoption was a very open topic of discussion. My [adoptive] parents always talked to me about it."

Maggie discussed the overall difficulties that occurred between she and her adoptive parents concerning adoption. Moreover, William believed that his choice to initiate a birth search would lead to his adoptive mother feeling unsure about her status as his mother. For Samantha, she recalled a memory where her adoptive parents were not transparent and honest about her birth mother. The participants described the relationship with their adoptive parents concerning adoption in a multitude of ways. Issues around adoption seemed to expose ruptures or complications to the parent-child relationship. The issues of mistrust or misinformation concerned the fidelity of birth parent history or the perceived security with an adoptive parent; along with feeling the adoptive parents were not prepared to meet their needs. This appeared to reinforce the notion that the adoptive parents could not be trusted or needed to be shielded from the adoptees' experience because they weren't prepared or able to understand. In addition, the Korean adoptees may have felt pressured to seek out answers independently without feeling

supported by their adoptive parents. These experiences seemed to suggest that Korean adoptees may encounter a sense of isolation due to either shielding their parents from information or feeling misunderstood and invalidated concerning adoption matters.

Some of the participants also shared how their adoptive parents attempted to be open and receptive toward their adoption experience and history. Maggie noted that the day of her adoption was celebrated by her adoptive family every year. Mike and Ramona reported that their adoptive parents were generally open to speaking about adoption. Mike also mentioned that he felt supported by his adoptive parents because of their willingness to plan trips back to Korea and their encouragement toward personal exploration. There was a wide range of involvement and recognition noted by the adoptees regarding their adoptive parents with adoption. There were clear differences when looking at the descriptions offered by Mike versus Maggie. The distinction suggested the different messaging the Korean adoptee received about their adoption history and how it was discussed within their parent-child relationship. It seems possible that the Korean adoptee was acutely aware of how their adoptive parents felt about adoption-related concerns and made certain decisions prior to or when those encounters occurred.

The participants also shared their experiences with adoptive parents not concerning adoption. Brett noted, “I'm a lot more tolerant or lenient toward her [my daughter] than say my [adoptive] parents were with my sister and myself. Although I think maybe [that] might be a reaction to my own childhood.”

Ramona offered, “My [adoptive] mom growing up would always kind of bring it into my attention; she was always critical of my weight growing up and now, even more so, that was a struggle.” Maggie reacted:

> [When talking about] the racism that I faced… [my adoptive father] would always believe me, but I think he would try to minimize it or dismiss it, mostly for his own comfort. Because I think he would think that was the right thing to do, you know? Don't, give it attention, don't let that person ruin your day. Don't give them the satisfaction of being upset, you know those types of things. Which all come, I think, from a well-intentioned place, but don't allow for the processing of the anger that's normal to come from those experiences.

William said:

> [I was in financial planning and I was a stockbroker for eight years and my adoptive dad responded] why would you ever give those up? And I'm like, I don't want to do that anymore...[he's] living vicariously through me. [He still wants me to] do that so whatever focus gets directed to that. I think over time I [have] become a different person to have a conversation with because my interests have changed, my focus has changed a lot since I was young so I don't know if he knows exactly how to relate to me.

Brett commented that his father was not very lenient or understanding as he would have liked growing up. Ramona has and continues to receive insults from her adoptive mother about her weight. William and Maggie said that their adoptive fathers have not been open to hearing their thoughts surrounding their career decisions and encounters with racism respectively; they both felt a lack of support. Within the group of

Korean adoptees, they presented examples of how their adoptive parents seemed to punish, trivialize, and even purposefully invalidate the experiences of their adoptive children. Starting at a young age, the Korean adoptees were motivated to develop a bond with their adoptive parents for safety and protection. However, the participants observed and remembered instances where they felt a lack of support, care, and regard from their adoptive parents during their childhood and even into adulthood. The decisions made by the adoptive parents seemed to contribute to potential difficulties with their adoptive children, such as: coping with certain emotions, self-acceptance, and not feeling supported. Unfortunately, the Korean adoptees were left with deciding how to navigate these potential rifts and chasms with their adoptive parents unless the ruptures were repaired.

Maggie commented positively about the relationship she has with her adoptive parents, “I would say my [adoptive] parents, definitely. I've certainly gotten to a place where I can talk to them much more openly and freely about my experiences and my thoughts and my opinions and how my experiences have influenced those opinions.” Mike offered his thoughts, “[My adoptive parents] allowed me to learn from my mistakes, they pushed me in directions that I should go, and they made their own mistakes, but they own up to them. And I think, that they gave me a great foundation to my life and a great foundation to build on to who I am today.” Samantha noted, “But [being the best at something] didn't really matter growing up, because my [adoptive] parents were gonna love me anyways no matter what.”

Parker said, “Yeah for being hard working...as soon like I turned 16, my [adoptive] parents are like, you've got to go get a job. So, they were just like...you need to work, they've always been very like if you don't like your job, that's fine, but you better keep your job until you find another job. They've always been...you're working throughout your life; we did not raise bums.”

Maggie seemed to describe how the relationship with her adoptive parents has changed over time where now she feels increasingly open and free to express herself. Mike noted that his adoptive parents have provided support; within the parent-child dyad they both engage in reciprocal accountability towards one another when mistakes are made. Parker reported that his parents have generally encouraged him to be financially independent and impressed upon him the value of employment. Samantha said that her adoptive parents have always demonstrated unconditional love and attention toward her. The reactions to these experiences appeared to highlight increasing openness, encouragement, involvement, and continuous support. These descriptors suggested how the relationship between parent and child can positively impact the adoptee’s well-being. It seems likely that if this type of bond is developed and established starting in childhood, then the adoptee can associate their adoptive parents with the symbols of care, closeness, and love. Moreover, the Korean adoptees may feel more comfortable incorporating helpful values and lessons that are introduced by their adoptive parents. The adoptees may not only feel supported and encouraged in the moment, but those reactions may be transposed onto the overarching relationship with one or both adoptive parents.

Adoptive siblings. As a child, Samantha described:

> I think a challenge that was really hard for me growing up was relating to my [Korean adoptive] brother...he never wanted to talk about adoption. He would rather just look at himself as an American only [and] I never really could relate to him that much…And so that was a really big challenge in my life because the one person who I know that's adopted and who's close to me. He never wanted to talk about any of it and anytime I brought it up he almost seemed a little annoyed.

Maggie reported, "I could talk to my [adoptive] sister more than I could my [adoptive] brother, even though my brother lives literally up the road. But he's just very caught in his own life, in his own world, and his kids, and all of those things. And we're just not [close] like that, that's not how our relationship is."

The Korean adoptees reminisced about positive interactions they had with their adoptive siblings. Abby and her Korean adoptee sister traveled to Korea:

> I took an afternoon and rode the subway and went to one of the big markets to shop with my [Korean adoptee] sister, [she] wanted to do that. And we just had the best time laughing and we're just enjoying the fact that we looked like everyone but we felt so, we didn't speak the language [when] we were there. Just her and I we navigated [on] our own and just really had a great time and just bonded over that and experienced it together and being two fish out of water in the same place, because it was weird to [feel] so out of your element in a place that in appearances, you should fit right into.

Maggie spoke about her experience interacting in a Korean restaurant with her adoptive sister, "[My adoptive sister] was talking about, Pajeon. So, the pancakes, she was like, you have to teach me how to make those! And I was like, okay. And how to make kimchi and all this stuff. So, it was because she [and her family] were so receptive to it, [it] certainly added to the positivity of that. If they were like, this sucks, it would have been a very different experience." Mike added, "Most of the identity issues I've always gone [through] my [adoptive] family because they were so readily accessible. And I guess going into that, I would talk to...my [internationally adopted] brothers and sisters, just about their lives and everything."

Samantha noted barriers to feeling supported and connected with her Korean adoptee brother. Maggie described how she has been able to discuss the impact of her adoption more with her non-adopted adoptive sister versus her non-adopted adoptive brother. Maggie also highlighted a time when her adoptive sister was receptive and curious about the Korean cuisine at a family dinner. Abby detailed how she and her Korean adoptee sister spent a day together in Korea and they were able to relate to one another in regards to feeling a lack of belonging. Mike broadly shared that his internationally adopted siblings have been accessible and an important source of support regarding day-to-day experiences.

The Korean adoptees offered a mixture of different responses when reacting to the relationships with their adopted siblings. One interesting aspect that arose within this theme was that some of the participants had adoptive siblings that were also adopted internationally, while others just had siblings who were biologically related to their adoptive parents. The development of connection with adoptive siblings seemed to range

from unimportant to very important. Despite the variation, there were instances when the adoptive siblings chose to be supportive or engaged with their Korean adoptee sibling. When reviewing Samantha's narrative versus Abby's, there were distinct differences in terms of feeling connected, understood, and supported. For the Korean adoptees who had an international adoptee sibling, there seemed to be a noticeable chasm if they were not a source of support. However, this did not mean that non-adopted sibling relationships with Korean adoptees were not valuable or meaningful.

Relationship with birth family. Seven of the eight participants spoke about their feelings toward birth family members and offered important information about their approach toward a birth search. The sub themes were *Birth Search*, *Longing for Connection*, and *Wondering about Birth Family*.

Birth search. Abby shared her experience with the birth search, "[I have] wanted and done multiple birth searches with not a whole lot of success…There's lots of [reasons] but I know for me, one of them was really wanting that medical history, and…I did try to do a birth search…and I wasn't able to learn anything." Samantha also faced a lack of success, "What I've got after sending letters [to my birth mother] when I was 17 from what I understand is she really doesn't want to meet me because she's still kind of ashamed of what she did, that she couldn't take care of me and that she feels bad." William offered his feelings about a birth search:

> I also have issues with doing a formal [birth] family search and actually looking for them and in approaching them. When I was there [in Korea] and I visited the orphanage.

> They told me that my birth mother had died and then I have three older half siblings…And so one thing that I constantly struggle with is seeking out my half siblings because they might not know about me and I don't want to dishonor my birth mother in anyway.

Brett offered the potential impact of finding his birth mother, "Yeah, just apprehension just knowing, that'd be a big deal [to meet my birth mom]. And that my emotions would be, if we'd [meet would] be really, really strong and evident that I wouldn't be in control…[of] my own emotions so that's where the apprehension comes from, it would be a big event." Ramona was the only person in the group who had found a birth parent and she detailed her journey:

> We contacted the adoption agency and we got in touch with my birth mom through the [adoption] agency, but she didn't really want to meet and she had married a guy probably within the year after I was born and has been with him ever since [when I was 11]…We did go the day of the meeting and we met [my birth mother]. We did end up meeting her, but it was a very strange, like secretive experience. We were in this white van and we pulled into an alleyway. And it was this secret, she jumped into the [van]...she wouldn't even be seen on the street with us. We went to this park where nobody was and we got to spend 40 minutes together and that was it. So, it was like a 45-minute meeting.

Abby detailed that her primary reason for doing a birth search was to acquire medical information. Samantha believed that the birth search was unsuccessful because her birth mother did not want contact, while William said that his hesitation with pursuing a search for his half-siblings was related to the potential shame his birth family

members may feel if they knew he was alive. Brett commented on the magnitude of potentially meeting his birth mother. Ramona disclosed that she had met her birth mother, but shared that meeting her initially was difficult and felt very secretive.

The prospect of meeting birth family can bring up feelings of frustration, confusion, rejection, and even apprehension for Korean adoptees. This topic can prompt many different considerations when choosing to pursue a birth search. These included the person's level of motivation for information, experience of disappointment related to the lack of contact or successes, and sensitivity to how birth family may react to the expedition. It seemed to create a conflictual situation for the Korean adoptees because the process was a stark reminder of current and past disappointment along with a lack of control. Depending on the pathway, different time markers may be reminiscent of the initial memory of being adopted; relinquished, abandoned, and disconnected from birth family members along with the birth country. This reinjury through the birth search process could reinforce how the Korean adoptee has chosen to cope with the initial and recurrent reminders of loss related to the adoption process. From Ramona's story we gleaned how the social and cultural norms of adoption in Korea were a strong deterrent against birth family meetings and reunions. For Korean adoptees, there are personal, familial, social, legal, and cultural considerations that can create barriers to experiencing a successful search for birth family.

Longing for Connection. Abby shared, "[Not having] that physical link it's frustrating and is one of the reasons [why] the whole birth search thing is so important to me. [I] was really craving that ability to connect on a [level] like why do I look the way that I do?" Samantha offered her reaction to possibly meeting her birth mother, "That's a

challenge that I deal with now…that I'm [an] adult. I really want to meet her and I want to just meet her [once], and have a conversation with her [and]... just show her what I grew up to be and different things like that." Brett added, "It's hard to put into words other than it's just, yeah longing. There [is] an ongoing sort of sadness [regarding my birth mother]." Ramona remembered, "I always dreamt growing up before I met my birth family that maybe one day, they would hear my song on the radio or somewhere, and know it was me. It was this fantasy I had for many years until I was able to reconnect [with them]."

Abby noted one desire to meet birth family was to obtain answers for questions about her physical characteristics and biological lineage. For Samantha, the longing to reconnect with her birth mother was to offer reassurance about her life and how she grew up. Ramona and Brett both described their overall longing for connection with birth family and how they thought about them. The participants identified instances where the thought of their birth parents brought up reactions of wanting to relationally reconnect, obtain specific information, or even provide information about their lives. The loss and absence of the birth family was present for the Korean adoptees. The longing for connection appeared to be accompanied by frustration, sadness, and even curiosity. Despite different reasons for seeking contact with birth family members, the yearning for contact continued to live on for the participants through adulthood. These thoughts, reflections, and reactions suggested that the salience of this disconnection can be compared to a very large relational canyon.

Wondering about birth family. Brett spoke about his interest in connecting with family through DNA testing, "So I took a DNA test and I haven't found any really close results, the closest has been a second cousin. So that's always in the back of my mind, maybe, today's the day I get the email…someday, there will be a hit as DNA tests testing becomes more and more popular." Samantha commented, "And I feel like since she [referring to her birth mother] doesn't want to meet me yet or it's not the right time, or she just needs time to process that it's gonna be hard for me because I don't know when or if I will get to share this experience with her." Maggie hypothesized about what her birth mother was thinking, "I think there's a lot of speculation that maybe [my birth mother]'s afraid, maybe she's had another family, and they don't know, and a thousand other possibilities." Peter elaborated, "Sometimes it's just like looking at other Koreans and thinking. Is this what I'm going to look like when I get older? Is this what my [birth] parents would look like, or is this what my [birth] family looks like? Because when I look at my adopted family, I don't really see that." William also self-reflected, "I have that internal conflict. I want to know who she was, what she did, what was her life? And if nothing else, I just want a picture of her to feel like I know her and I feel like my story isn't completed until I see that."

Brett disclosed his interest in DNA testing and how that may assist him with finding biological family members. Samantha and Maggie brainstormed ideas for why their birth mother may not be interested in meeting them, but Maggie also shared it would be difficult for her if she never got the opportunity to meet her birth mother. Peter mentioned his longing to know what he will look like as he continues to age and grow older. William noted that his personal narrative would not complete without at least a

physical picture of his birth mother; he is also interested in learning about his birth mothers' life.

The Korean adoptees seemed to demonstrate curiosity, openness, and a yearning to interact with their familial history or physical makeup. The topics of interest included: hoping for biological matches through DNA, what stops my birth mother from connecting with me, and wondering about their physical appearance as they age. The Korean adoptees revealed how the topic of birth parents can evoke concerns with cultural norms, physical resemblance, and the importance of establishing bonds with biological family members. The absence of the birth family can create cloudiness and unanswerable questions for the participants about their personal, biological, and cultural backgrounds. The Korean adoptees appeared motivated to uncover hidden links to familial history and open to collecting responses to unanswered questions.

Relationship with other adoptees. All of the participants offered reactions to interacting with other adoptees. This section also included descriptions about the frequency, overall impressions, and precise examples of those relationships. The sub themes are: *Level of Interaction*, *Overall Impression*, and *Quality of Interaction*.

Level of interaction. Referring to his childhood, Mike said, "I really didn't have a lot of interaction with [Korean] adoptees when I was younger." Parker noted, "I used to have a lot more involvement back when I was younger versus what I do now [with Korean adoptees]." Ramona shared, "In high school, I would go hang out with [Korean adoptees from culture camp] on the weekends and on the regular instead of hanging [with] my high school friends." Maggie explained, "I had two [Korean] adoptee friends growing up: one from when I was basically adopted; her parents told my parents about

the agency…and then the other friend I had wasn't till I was a junior in high school. And she was the first person who wanted to talk about the shitty parts and the sad parts and the depressing parts."

Abby recounted as an adult, "I think the second year [of culture camp] they kind of did this impromptu adult adoptee session. So, they reached out to some parents that were adult adoptees and I met a mom through that group who I'm now still friends with. And because she has adopted kids too that were there...her sons and my son connected." Brett said, "When I was in my 20s, I got involved with Korean adoptee groups in [California]...and I kind of dropped out of that for about 10 or 15 years. And just in the last year, I've been meeting Korean adoptees again." William shared, "I've connected with AK connection in the Twin Cities. Which it's good, but it's still, three and a half hours away from where I live. So, I still feel somewhat disconnected...I don't have a community [of Korean adoptees] that's near me that I can just call…and have lunch with. I can't call somebody and have coffee with them."

Mike and Maggie noted that in childhood they did not have a lot of relationships or interactions with other Korean adoptees. Peter recalled having contact with other Korean adoptees during childhood, while Ramona recounted notable encounters that occurred during high school. In adulthood, Abby met one Korean adult adoptee friend, who she met at Korean culture camp through an adult adoptee session. Brett added that he first become involved with the Korean adoptee community in his 20s, but that his participation has been inconsistent since that time. William noted feeling isolated from other Korean adoptees due to where he lives and is required to drive over three hours to attend meetups with members of the Korean adult adoptee community.

From the interviews, the participants presented diverse levels of exposure with other Korean adoptees in childhood and also as adults. As youth, the participants were dependent on their adoptive parents or happenstance to form and develop connections with other Korean adoptees. Moving into adulthood, the Korean adoptees had the opportunity to independently construct social networks with other peers, groups, and communities of Korean adoptees. Attending Korean culture camps also seemed to facilitate interactions between Korean adoptees, both as children and adults. Without the exposure or information about these resources or events, Korean adoptees may struggle to form those peer relationships. This seems particularly relevant if the person lives in an area where there aren't any centralizing events, gatherings or groups.

Overall impression. Ramona provided her opinion:

> I just feel like there's always drama [with other Korean adoptees], I just feel like I get wrapped up in the middle of drama and stuff a lot of times. And so, it's not to say that I won't hang out with [Korean] adoptees I still will, but I'm just...a little more just cautious. And I don't like [to] get annihilated...hammered drunk or anything like I may have done in the past.

William noted:

> Korean adoptees that are "super engaged" with Korean culture I'm not always super comfortable being around them. Because so many times I feel like...they're engaged with a lot of the surface parts of the culture, the food, the music, K pop or those types of things, which is just such a small part of the actual culture.

> Or the ones that have found their birth families and they spent a lot of time in Korea, and they speak Korean and they'll say that, I don't know. I almost feel less comfortable around them than actual Koreans."

Mike provided a different reaction to interacting with other adoptees, "And that was incredibly validating to talk to people who finally just understood, and I didn't need to explain things to or justify things or try to get them to understand. They just got it." Peter seemed to share a similar sentiment:

> I guess the comfort [when speaking with Korean adoptees is] in that knowledge of knowing that you don't have to explain things for people to understand...It was never a question of [what] we had to talk about, were you adopted or what was it like to be adopted? I mean, I will. We've talked about what was it like to be, but it was never...[a] phase of our friendship where we had the question, where we came from, or [about] the adoption process.

Brett mentioned, "Korean adoptees [have different] characteristics, our personalities, can be really different, but at least maybe with that feeling of safety it's a lot more possible to connect with somebody than [it] would be otherwise... [in other situations] maybe my guard is up a lot more around non adoptees [which] makes it harder to make those kinds of connections."

Abby mentioned the benefits of openness with another Korean adoptee, "Have a relationship with somebody who you have that in common with [referring to adoption] it doesn't necessarily have [to be] the same experience as you, but is okay with that, you know [without] passing judgment, necessarily either way. So yeah, that's been nice." Mike said:

> I feel like a lot of the times when we talk about [adoption] with other adoptees it wasn't really related to the adoption itself…[it] is more about how adoption affected your life, how it affected my life…How [did] you cope with [adoption] more than it has to do with like anything else. And it wasn't a direct question... [such as] how [do] you feel about being adopted because I don't think I asked that question that often. But I do ask other people like what do you think [about] how you grew up this way or that way? How was that like? How did that affect you...How did your adoption story affect your life, even without asking?

Ramona and William pointed out that when spending time with Korean adoptees they felt uncomfortable or hesitant; potentially due to drama and the degree to which other Korean adoptees have integrated the Korean culture respectively. Mike and Peter disclosed that spending time with other Korean adoptees can feel validating, particularly when they do not need to explain or justify their personal experiences. Brett and Mike commented on how they feel a sense of safety and feel at-ease when spending time with other adoptees. For Abby, she noticed when speaking with another Korean adoptee that there was a lack of judgment regarding her current and past behaviors.

These reactions reflected the overall impressions that the participants have had primarily with Korean adoptees, but with other adoptees in general. Sometimes, these interactive experiences may cause personal distress, particularly if the adoptee social group contributed to interpersonal drama or if there were notable differences among the Korean cultural identification within the group. Other participants seemed to highlight the personal comfort, familiarity, and safety that occurred when they engaged other adoptees. The comfort and safety when speaking with adopted peers may also reduce the

worry of anticipatory judgment or invalidation when compared to conversing with non-adoptees. Overall, the Korean adoptees seemed to display a willingness and comfort when they disclosed personal information with other adoptees. The reactions by the participants seemed to suggest that forming relationships with other adoptees could be a valuable and an essential source of support. These connections and relationships have the potential to cultivate a comfortable, empathetic, and a non-judgmental space.

Brett commented on the feeling of connectedness with other Korean adoptees, "The connections that we can make with each other seem to me to be quite special, much different [than other] friendships I have outside of the Korean adoptee world…we just click. I seem to click a lot [with other Korean adoptees]." Maggie said, "Certainly with other [Korean] adoptees, it's that kind of camaraderie, a sense of the commonalities or the similarities that we've had growing up, the racism we might have encountered or the struggles we might have had." Mike shared, "[When I engage with other adoptees] it definitely makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I'm not alone. I think that's the biggest thing. I feel like...I'm not the only one going through these adoption-related issues." Samantha painted the picture of:

> [When interacting with another Korean adoptee] I'm trying to think of the right way to phrase this. It's like a moment that you really know you can only share between you and this one other person.

> It's a meaningful conversation of just understanding what they've been through, and just this overall connection and bonding over something; that almost feels like your kids again just playing on the playground and you meet someone who you really understand, connect with…[it] almost feels like you're back in kindergarten and just sharing the swing with someone and then becoming best friends.

Brett shared that the bonds formed with other Korean adoptees radiate a sense of connectedness that contrasts with those ties formed with non-adoptees. Maggie and Mike both agreed that developing relationships with other adoptees begins with the foundation of shared experience and usually decreases feelings of isolation. Samantha also said that interacting with other Korean adoptees begins with the shared experience and connection, but she felt that those interactions could unfold into a series of genuine and meaningful exchanges over time. The participants qualitatively described the special and beneficial characteristics of communicating with other adoptees. The quotes suggested that having other adoptee relationships may represent genuine, significant, and helpful sources of communication. Moreover, forming relationships with other adoptees may increase the feeling of belonging and reduce the perception that they are alone or that no one else can relate to their experiences. Using the image of a pendulum, the majority of the responses from the participants pointed to a smooth, safe, and comfortable swing when they interacted with other adoptees. Not only did the adoptees feel secure and calm when the pendulum swings, but they felt that other adoptees have the capacity to emulate or match the same swinging motion with them. The harmony noted within the swinging motion of the pendulum represented the experience of connectedness and relatability detailed by the participants.

It could be very powerful to realize that there are other people who can relate to your experience in an authentic way; who can potentially symbolize an irreplaceable mechanism for effective coping, along with sustaining personal well-being.

Quality of interaction. The examples offered in this section detailed specific interactions noted by the Korean adoptees versus generalized impressions offered in the previous theme. Ramona described, “Once we got to the older years, like high school and in college...I stopped going, I only went there [to culture camp] two years after high school to be a counselor. But once you get up into the counselor realm, I felt it to be very just really clique, and I don't know whether it was like a Colorado thing or [Korean culture] camp thing.” William seemed to hint at difficulties breaking through sub-groups within Korean adoptee communities, “I would say last year when we first...went to that AK connection event that [it] was very uncomfortable for me because I didn't know anybody…They were close knit within that community. I didn't know how to navigate in and out of that because that's not an environment I'm familiar with and it took people separating to draw me into it.” Maggie detailed:

> I’ve only maybe had a couple negative adoptee interactions, and it wasn't really even that it was super negative. It was just we didn't get along. We just believed very different things. Especially around the [presidential] election, I had some negative interactions, just because we were on very different sides of the political spectrum. And neither person was really seeing the other side at all. So, it wasn't necessarily negative, it was just not the same as the other interactions that I've had.

Mike opened up about a positive experience with another adoptee:

Last year I talked to another Chinese [adult] adoptee. We talked a lot about life and it was under the stars and everything. So, it's really cool and everything, it was outside in a cabin...we just talked for a while. And again, it kind of comes back to the shared feelings and shared thoughts and...it was helpful to be able to open up like that because I don't think I've really opened up to a lot of people before that.

Samantha cited a close relationship with a Korean adult adoptee:

I definitely see [my Korean adoptee friend who lived in the same town as me growing up as] more of a sister to me. We really just understand each other and we can go months without seeing each other [or] talking. And then as soon as we're with each other, it's this chemical reaction that's just pure happiness, an explosion of just joy and overwhelming and just [an] awesome feeling. And it's someone who, even though I could go months without seeing [them it’s] just like comes back to you [all] at once. The feeling of this is someone who really understands me. This is someone who cares about what I've been through, and has gone through something very similar. And we just have a relationship that's unlike any of my other friends. Due to [growing] up with each other, but also we experienced a bunch of different things together that no one else can experience and it's really made us grow as people and it's made our relationship grow in a way that's different than how I would describe my other friends[hips].

Ramona remembered a time when she was in high school:

There were four girls and then four guys that were all around my age...one experience that stands out was just as we would go to the [Korean culture] camp. It was three days long and we would...all do a sleepover like slumber party outside of the camp. So, we would all hang out with pizza…and we [would] just talk. It was just fun, we would talk, we would share stories about our experiences being adopted and we would stay up all night long and just be fuming on energy drinks the whole weekend.

William also shared:

I'm looking to go back and go to Korea with one of my [Korean adult] adoptee friends and she's never been there. And until recently she really hasn't engaged a whole lot with Korean culture, other than the aspects of what I've brought to her…And now [Korea's] this thing for her and for me. That's nice because now I have somebody that I can talk to about these things, that I've known for a long time…but never engaged with the [Korean] culture that way, it makes it easier for me. I wish there was more of it because we can talk about what did it feel like to watch *Seoul Searching* or any of these movies or to watch a Korean movie or a movie just with Asian people.

Ramona and William both detailed how spending time with other Korean adoptees can be difficult because of having to navigate certain social groups or cliques at adoptee-centric events. Maggie also shared that during the presidential election she remembered difficult conversations with other Korean adoptees due to differences in political ideology. William, Ramona, and Mike detailed past interactions and relationships with other international adoptees that encapsulated the feeling of freedom

and safety to share personal experiences. Samantha spoke about her relationship with another Korean adoptee. She described how their bond was strong and significant enough to endure long breaks between contact because of the depth and level of their meaningful exchanges.

The Korean adoptees referenced negative interactions with other Korean adoptees due to difficulties with navigating social groups or cliques. Also, there may be times where there are interpersonal conflicts that occurred between Korean adoptees due to differences in cultural, social, or personal backgrounds and belief systems. The participants also provided several poignant examples of exchanges or relationships with other international adult adoptees that were impactful and beneficial. The participants' detailed instances of comfort, safety, uniqueness, and shared understanding on a significant level. Not one of the entries, but noting them as parts to a whole picture displayed how those relationships could potentially benefit Korean adoptees; based on feeling a sense of connectedness, community, and support. Also, these interpersonal links could be an important resource for cultivating corrective and adaptive relationships formed on the basis of validation, empathy, and care. Even those who have endured problematic encounters with other adoptees seemed motivated to continue seeking out those ties.

Relationship with ethnically and racially diverse groups. Seven of the eight participants described their contact with and without ethnic or racial diversity during the interviews. The sub themes are *Interaction with People of C*olor and *Lack of Exposure to Asian People*.

Interaction with people of color. Parker spoke about his experience growing up, "When I was in middle school and elementary school, I went to schools that were predominantly African American. I think my [adoptive] parents were trying to integrate their [adoptive] children into a public-school system that my younger [adoptive] brother [and] [adoptive] sister would feel comfortable in." Samantha shared about her experience meeting people in college:

> [The Korean Student Association and the Asian Pacific Club] groups are not specifically for adopted people. So, there's a mix of everything, we have exchange students who come and visit, we have first generation Asian Americans, we have so many mixes of people who are there. And what's surprising to me is how people are accepting of everyone in a sense of...we're all just one little community and it doesn't matter. Say one person's adopted and one person's a foreign exchange student, [we're] all welcome there and that's really cool.

Ramona also reacted to meeting people in college, "In college, our group of friends was [a] very mixed bag, we had a Korean, we had Chinese, we had Filipino, it was all different people. And then…yeah, Black, Hispanic [friends as well] ...I also got involved in the school concert venue...while I was there and so that opened me up to a very diverse group of people."

Parker shared that his adoptive parents made efforts to expose him and his other adoptive siblings to children of color starting in elementary school. Ramona and Samantha reported that attending college offered opportunities to meet and develop friendships with different ethnic and racial groups. At different ages in school, the Korean adoptees commented on their opportunities to interact with people of color.

Intermingling with other children or adults of color seemed dependent on the location, decisions, and willingness of their adoptive parents. The racial and ethnic composition of the adoptive family's friends, neighborhood, and local schools could strongly influence the degree of exposure each adoptee had. However, as adults, Korean adoptees may have greater autonomy and choice to socialize with groups, communities, and individuals of color. However, if there are minimal attempts made by adoptive families, Korean adoptees may internalize the notion that White people and norms are the measured standard beginning in childhood.

Lack of exposure to Asian people. Abby remembered, "Lived in Missouri and I'm pretty confident my [Korean adoptee] sister and I were the only Asians in that town. And there was obviously no Koreans in town…I went to [elementary through high] school here in Colorado. I mean, again, my sister and I were probably the only Asians." Parker recalled, "I kind of always went to school with a good mix of minorities, I mean, not so much Asians. I mean, there would be a few, but I mean there weren't very many Asians in the area that I was living [in]." Samantha noted, "Yeah, elementary school and middle school was…basically me and another girl and a boy who transferred to our school later, more [in] middle school…I was one of the two Asians in my class, my [high school] graduating class." William added, "Prior to [college], I didn't have much dialogue or connection with anybody that was Korean or let alone Asian...[there] weren't adoptees [either]."

Abby, Parker, and Samantha noted in their schools and general neighborhood that it was rare to interact with other Asian people. William noted it wasn't until attending college that he was introduced to Asian and more specifically Korean people. From the

standpoint of the participants, exposure and interaction with Asian people starting at a young age was generally absent. The Korean adoptees also commented on not only the lack of other Asian people, but shared how they visibly stuck out in their schools or local areas. The participants noticed themselves within the context of their local communities or peers, and seemed to feel physically isolated within those spaces. The gradient noted by the Korean adoptees seemed as apparent as putting a group of oranges with a group of apples, they stick out! Throughout this process, each person attempted to make sense of their physical world around them. It seems possible that without seeing people who resemble them phenotypically, the Korean adoptee may struggle to differentiate themselves as children of color, or more specifically identify themselves as Asian and Korean.

Relationships with Korean people. All of the Korean adoptees shared experiences when they interacted or formed relationships with Korean people, both in the United States and in Korea. The sub themes were *General Impressions*, *Negative or Neutral Reaction*, and *Positive Reaction*.

General impression. These experiences will reflect interactions the adoptees have had with Koreans in the United States. Abby said, "I didn't pursue [relationships with other Korean people]. It wasn't like I avoided it, but I didn't actively pursue it. But I never felt like it was readily available, I would have had to try really hard I think to find that." Parker noted, "[Interacting with Korean people was] never really one of those thoughts that crossed my mind, do you need to be friends with Koreans or do you need to have a good support group of Korean friends or Asian friends? I think that it just never really crossed my mind of, do I need to seek this out?" Mike had a different reaction:

> The process I think has [been] complicated [in terms of my relationship with the Korean community]. I guess that's the best way to describe it. It was not easy at the beginning and I've talked about this a little bit before but I definitely had a lot more rejection for that sort of community and that feeling because I didn't feel like I really belonged…And in some cases, I felt like they just kind of left me behind.

William provided his reaction to spending time with Koreans in college, "It also gave me the realization that I had to actually work to feel like I was fitting in. I had to be a certain way. I had to act a certain way. I had to be good at certain things. I had to fill these expectations on this other side where…I learned deeper that this is what Koreans do. This is how Koreans live, these are the expectations.

The following details offered general impressions of the Korean adoptees' experience interacting with Koreans in Korea. Maggie spoke, "Certainly on the Korean adoptee group tour everything was super positive...people were very welcoming. No one made us feel like we didn't belong there…I certainly didn't get that impression from anybody." Parker remembered, "A lot of people spoke English over there, but it was like, people would just come up and start talking to me in Korean, it was like, oh my God. I have no idea what you're saying, I'm so sorry, and I think it was just that sad moment [of], oh my God, you can't even tell these people that you don't understand."

William provided his reaction, “Going and spending time with other Koreans that were friends of friends and being in those social situations and not always knowing what was happening or why people were doing certain things; that was frustrating at times. Because it was, I wish that I just understood and knew so that I could just kind of navigate [and] do things on my own. I had to be dependent.”

Abby and Parker noted that developing relationships with other Korean people in the United States was not something that was available or salient for them. Mike shared that feeling abandoned and a lack of relatability with the Korean culture stunted his pursuit of developing relationships with Korean people. William said that his efforts to form interpersonal connections with other Korean people in college presented him with a unique opportunity to learn about the cultural norms and standards. For Maggie, being a part of the Korean adoptee group tour seemed to provide a positive and comfortable space to interact with Korean people. However, for Parker and William they brought up their personal difficulties interacting with Korean people due to their inability to communicate in Korean.

For Abby, Parker, and Mike in the United States, they made decisions or were unable to cultivate relationships with Korean people. Based on their responses, they seemed to endorse a spectrum of passive to active avoidance toward creating those ties. William did explain how college presented him with the chance to not only form bonds with Korean people, but also an opening to learn about some of the cultural standards and expectancies. In the United States as adults, the Korean adoptees appeared to exhibit a sense of choice and agency regarding their pursuit of relationships with Korean people.

When the participants chose to visit Korea and interact with native Koreans, their shield seemed overwhelmed when facing the people, culture, and language. Through the protection and safety of a group adult adoptee tour, Maggie appeared to interact with Koreans who were sensitive and welcoming to her and the other tour attendees. However, without the assistance of interpreters or knowing the language, the adoptees seemed to express feelings of isolation and frustration. The language barrier presented a large obstacle for the Korean adoptees during their stay. Despite sharing a physical resemblance to the people there, the lack of linguistic skill in Korea may have recreated the perception of being an outsider and even foreign. Not only does this appear frustrating and disempowering, but these exchanges in Korea may prompt the Korean adoptee to reassess aspects of their Korean adoptee narrative and identity.

Negative or neutral reaction. These excerpts will be with Korean adoptees encountering Korean people in the United States. Maggie reported, “I think I mentioned at the nail salon, they often ask why I can't speak Korean, and then I have to explain, and then there's usually this whole dropping of their expression.” Samantha mentioned, “I remember having a conversation with someone who's a second generation Korean American and I remember just talking to them about how their life has been growing up and [how] it was so different from mine.” William noted, “So I've met one, she's technically [a] first generation Korean immigrant and she works on the campus that I'm housed at. And every time I see her, I bow to her and she's older than me and I bow like very deeply to her and she doesn’t expect that, but I think she appreciates it. But I knew she was not a [Korean] adoptee. I feel like you can tell.”

Other participants shared their encounters with Korean people in Korea. Abby remembered:

> We walked to a store to get something and I was with my husband who's White, the blonde hair, blue [eyes], he couldn't be any whiter, and we walked into the store. The Korean store owner came onto [me] started spewing Korean to me and I just...froze like I couldn't even speak. I just felt oh my gosh he thinks I can speak it, understand his language, and in my head, I was like he's gonna be so disappointed. How do I tell him and my gosh, what do I do? And my husband ended up being the one that basically said, we don't speak Korean and I'm sure the guy thought I was deaf, mute or whatever. I don't know why I just froze and after that moment I was very uncomfortable because all of a sudden, I felt all these expectations. I look like everyone so of course, everyone's going to assume and they're going to probably look at me and go, well, why are you dressed the way you're dressed? I just felt, and I just remember I didn't want to leave my husband's side because I felt like if I'm with him, then people will understand.

Maggie shared about an experience getting around Seoul:

> We got lost [going to the adoptee guesthouse], and the [Korean] guy started trying to talk to me to ask me things, and I had no idea, naturally, what he was saying, because he's speaking in Korean, and I don't understand any of it. And I keep apologizing, and I keep saying, I don't speak Korean, I'm sorry I don't know what you're saying. So, he eventually called the guesthouse, they tried to give him directions, but he still got lost. So, then I called my friend, and he came out to the end of the driveway that led up to where the guest house was, and he…was just

standing there, waving his arms…I eventually got there, but that was really the only time that I felt so much of an outsider.

Parker recalled an experience with someone at a store:

There was this giant store a couple blocks from the hotel that I was staying [at], and I was just doing some shopping. And I stopped in there and there were not very many people in there, but there was this older Korean cashier and I was looking at some jewelry at the counter and she started talking to me [in] Korean. It was like, I am so sorry I don't understand. And then, she was like, you have a face of Korea. And I was like, oh my God, I know, I'm sorry, but I just don't speak Korean, it was so embarrassing. And I think she got [that I was from America] because her next question was like California? And it was, oh, no [I'm] from Colorado, but I couldn't explain that.

In the United States, Maggie encountered Korean workers at a nail salon and they seemed stunned why she couldn't respond to them in Korean. Samantha recalled speaking with a second generation Korean American and being able to discuss their distinct experiences growing up. William shared how he chooses to bow and great another Korean woman when he sees her at work. The tone and length of the descriptions dramatically shifted when the Korean adoptees presented their stories from Korea. Abby viscerally retold an interaction with a Korean shop owner after he started speaking Korean to her, she froze and was unable to directly address him in conversation.

Parker and Maggie mentioned their inability to communicate with Korean people and how they attempted to apologize because of the language barrier. For Parker there was a sense of embarrassment, while Maggie felt that moment demarcated a sense of being an outsider.

It was critically important to distinguish the types of experiences the participants had when interacting with Korean people in the United States versus in Korea. For Korean people in the United States, there was variance in regards to the acculturation level and linguistic ability in English and Korea. Accounting for the within-group differences, Korean adoptees may feel more comfortable to engage Korean people in the United States, versus in Korea. When reviewing the narratives of the Korean adoptees interacting with Korean people in Korea, there was a resounding theme around linguistic fluency. The inability to speak and communicate with the different Korean people in their examples, spurred feelings of pressure, frustration, and disappointment. In each of the examples, the participants seemed very concerned about the Korean person's reaction in the moment. These concrete language barriers appeared to significantly affect the Korean adoptees' feelings of confidence and belonging, along with impede their ability to communicate or build new relationships with Korean people in Korea. The Korean language barrier should be strongly considered when Korean adoptees plan a trip back to Korea.

Positive *reaction.* The first section will detail instances when Korean adoptees interacted with Korean people in the United States. Maggie provided an example, "[The Korean restaurant in South Carolina] was just a wonderful place for me to go and feel accepted and safe and that it was okay, you know, that there's a lot of ways to be Korean.

But, it's okay for me to start figuring it out and start understanding what it meant to me." Parker told me:

> Last night I went out with my friend and she's half Korean and half German and so we were talking a lot about similarities that we share…And it was one of those things where it's oh wow that's interesting that she and I have the similarities that I have biologically, but I don't share them with [my] adopted family. I get the Asian flush, my body does and my adoptive family don't get the Asian flush. So, it was one of those moments like that in my life where oh okay, I belonged biologically to Koreans, but my [adoptive] family is not and they can't experience those things.

William offered his experience:

> I connected with the couple that's doing the [Korean cultural and language center], they're [a] very impressive couple. He is a second generation Korean and she is African and they married and she's just more Korean than any adoptee I've ever met. And the couple [will] provide...an accurate depiction of what it is to be Korean, to live in Korea, so that the [Korean] adoptee can be comfortable engaging in the culture on their own. So, I've been helping them and we've been working on that for a while now.

The following examples offer positive reactions to having relationships or encounters with Korean people in Korea. Samantha recounted a story:

> And so [the Korean host family] they're so open to showing me about their daily life and how they function...I feel like that really helped me understand what it's like to live there and the culture and what they do, day to day…I remember on my

second trip [to Korea] the host family I was staying with was just doing everything in their ability to make sure that I got the whole cultural experience. They took me to places that they go [to] on vacation and that really meant a lot to them and I could see their faces shining as I experienced stuff for the first time, and it was so cool to just witness and experience [it]

Maggie said:

[The daughter of the host mom] was sitting across from me and she looked at me, and she was like, you look so Korean. And I remember this moment of wanting to cry because for the first time it was such a compliment to hear from a Korean person that I was Korean...I remember [saying to myself], don't cry, don't cry. I said, thank you that's so nice of you. And it was that moment, I was not upset that she said that, I'm not mad or sad or angry that she said that. I was so touched and kind of overwhelmed by the fact that she had so readily accepted me as another Korean person…she taught me things and explained things, but there was no judgment, and there was no, you're a bad Korean because you don't understand these things.

Ramona spoke about meeting her birth family at the airport on her last trip to Korea:

I went through the sliding doors and I didn't even look up for a second before somebody just grabbed my hand and was pulling me along. And I barely even got to look at the sea of Korean faces that were holding signs for their family members before somebody was just off and pulling me along and my birth mom is really short…just this little tiny person was just pulling me along and her

> husband's really tall…He just said something to me in Korean. I don't even know what, I just did a bow and, you know, an-young-ha-se-yo. And he is talking to me in Korean saying, how happy he was to meet me. And finally, we didn't hug or anything (my bio mom's husband) really because he was not really affectionate at first. But he ended up being very affectionate and wanting to hold my hand all the time and embraced and [we] watched TV right next to each other, ate out of the same bowl, etc. But then my birth mom is very affectionate, which is nice because my American [adoptive] family is not overly affectionate.

Maggie elaborated on a positive experience interacting with a Korean restaurant owner and how that was a safe environment for her to begin exploring her Korean background. Parker detailed a conversation with a half Korean friend and through their conversation he delineated aspects of himself from members of his adoptive family. William addressed how he has been able to work with a second-generation Korean man and his African wife toward developing a Korean cultural center. Maggie and Samantha shared narratives where the Korean people in Korea were inviting and sensitive to the experiences of the Korean adoptees. They felt accepted and welcomed by members of their Korean host families. Ramona retold how she was greeted at the airport by her birth mother and her husband, and she noticed their affection and tenderness toward her.

The Korean adoptees described positive experiences or interactions with Korean people in the United States. Whether they were professional or casual relationships, the Korean adoptees seemed to express a sense of safety and relatability when they interacted with Korean people.

Moreover, it appeared that the participants were able to navigate differences in language ability or cultural orientation. The individual stories seemed to represent the participant's comfortable exchanges with Korean people, where they could safely digest or discuss cultural information.

The affirming stories shared by the participants also noted how they bonded with Korean people in Korea. For instance, the adoptees described them as open, warm, caring, and generous. The Korean adoptees appeared comfortable and trusting when they were being exposed to new situations and contexts; there weren't any examples of feeling overwhelmed or burdened. The participants also detailed the interactions with the Korean person occurred through activities, conversations, or information. It appeared that the Korean adoptees met Korean people in Korea who were willing and able to provide non-threatening cultural and linguistic exchanges; a potentially tremendous resource for Korean adoptees. In all of the examples, the Korean adoptees appeared open and motivated to interact with Korean people. When there are non-judgmental and open spaces, Korean adoptees can form important and meaningful interpersonal and cultural exchanges with Korean people both in the United States and Korea.

Relationship with Korea. All eight of the Korean adoptees discussed a connection with Korea, through their description of contact with Korea or the level of exposure to the country and/or the culture. The sub themes were *Connection with Korea* and *Exposure to Korea*.

Connection with Korea. Samantha provided an image regarding her connection to Korea, "I think it's really hard to explain it to people who haven't gone through the same thing, but the way I like to phrase it to people who aren't adopted is imagine that

you've been away from home for years and you haven't gotten to go back and you haven't seen your home [for] years and it's been so long." Abby remarked:

> I have guilt around that. I should feel connected to my [Korean] culture. I want my [adopted] kids to feel that, not because I think they should, but more so that they have that connection. And that's part of their identity, maybe that's why I've struggled with my identity. And I just don't have that connection and then it makes me sad, but I just don't. I don't know how to feel a connection...I wish I did.

William also seemed to think about his family, "When [my two daughters] were born [it] was when I really started to recognize that...those things that I desired to connect with being Korean, they don't exist. And I want them to be able to have access to those things and those people in the [Korean] culture." Brett reflected:

> When I was younger, I felt I could maybe somehow go to Korea and stay there and become Korean [and] feel like I belonged there. But as I grew older, I didn't feel [that same way]…maybe when you're younger there's [the thought] I can marry a Korean woman and have a relationship...I'm not sure [if] that's true but when I was younger, there was much more of a feeling that I could be there and become Korean in my own way.

Despite feeling a disconnection with Korea, Abby remarked about adopting children from Korea, "I guess, because that just felt very natural. For me it wasn't even a question, of course, I wanted to adopt from Korea. That was where I felt connected. It would've felt weird if I had [not]. I think I would have felt like I was rejecting where I came from if I had said, nope, we're going to go adopt from Russia." William noted, "I

do understand like the nuances of how things systemically work in that entire country [referring to Korea]. But I don't speak the language and I listen to K Pop sometimes. I watch Korean movies, but I read the subtitles of what they're saying." Maggie believed that connection can be an ongoing process with Korea:

> I do feel there is a connection with Korean culture and people, but not as deeply, just because it's not my culture. It's not what I was raised with, but I definitely feel more connected to it now, since the [homeland] tour [to Korea], than I ever had before that, because I was able to understand that I can be connected to it…I almost didn't let myself be connected to it before, but after that and being immersed in it and being surrounded by Korean people; who were so welcoming and so excited that we were there and experiencing Korea for the first time and wanting to show us everything good about Korea. [That] made me really want to be connected to it, and want to be a part of that and be involved…so, I definitely do connect with that.

Samantha reflected on how the relationship with Korea reminded her of being physically detached from her home and that it has been many years since the last contact occurred. For William and Abby, they identified their feeling of disconnection from Korea because of their children. Brett noted how his aspirations to become Korean and connect with the country has waned over time. Despite expressing personal difficulties with feeling a connection to Korea, Abby admitted that being adopted from Korea was a strong reason for choosing to adopt children from there as well. Although he acknowledged a feeling of disconnection, William also described his contiguity with Korean culture through watching movies or listening to Korean music. Maggie noticed

that her connection with Korean people and the Korean culture could have more depth, but referenced that visiting Korea shaped her motivation to continue building those bridges with her birth country.

Using the imagery provided by Samantha, there was an emotional and physical disconnection that occurred with Korea, the place and culture. The chasm that developed can also create its own challenges to forming new or lasting bonds. The ability to remember or to refamiliarize yourself with what that looked like may also become so blurred or overwhelming the choice of reculturating yourself could be too laborious. Also, the adoptee may feel disoriented or directionless on how to establish it or nurture those connections. The participants offered differing degrees of connectedness with Korea. The Korean adoptees seemed to recognize that the connection with Korea can be malleable over time, despite the sizeable initial separation. There appeared to be space for Korean adoptees to choose how they related to Korea and the identification of choices that fit their personal needs and wants. Regardless of the type or intensity of the contact, the common thread suggested that being initially detached from Korea continues to have an everlasting and extensive impact for these Korean adoptees.

Exposure to Korea. Abby remarked about Korean culture camp, “And then we started going to Korean culture camp. [This] will be our fifth year this year, I want to say outside of that I don't have Korean friends. I just have not been exposed to that [referring to Korean people and culture].” Samantha also attended Korean culture camp as a child, “[My adoptive parents] would send me and my [adoptive] brother to camp and show [us] that we aren't alone and that there's other Asians and other people out there who share the same experience as us.”

Ramona also attended Korean culture camp, “The overall experience [was] something that I loved for so many years. At that camp, [I] was going and [was] able to be myself and be around other [Korean] adoptees.”

Some of the participants told me about their exposure to Korea outside of Korean culture camp as children. Maggie shared, “My experience with Korean culture was, the once-a-year Christmas party at the adoption agency where they [had] these things that came from Korea. And it was like, coin purses and lipstick cases and things that meant nothing to me.” William noted a similar experience, “We would go to our annual Korean picnic every summer with all of the adoptees, which was awkward...Because it's not like we were getting any Korean culture out of it, other than maybe somebody's found kimchi at the grocery store.” Parker reported, “Near where I lived, [an adoption agency] would do once a month on Saturdays…[they] would have classes for children…so we [would] do that once a month for I think, three years.” Ramona said, “We went to Korea in 2000, it was right after my fifth-grade year.” Mike added, “I've been to Korea three [total] times, um, once when I was 16, I think another time when I was 17 or 18.”

For Korean adoptees as adults, Brett detailed, “I really wanted to get to know Koreans. When I was in my late teens, I got involved with...sort of political [events] in Los Angeles; they were political groups protesting so somehow, I got in touch with them and became involved... [I visited] maybe once or twice a month.” Abby said, “And then the fourth time [to Korea] was a couple years ago with our [adopted] kids…I will say that even after the trip that we took with our kids that was more about being tourists or seeing the country and showing them the country and experiencing it.” Samantha shared, “I've been learning the [Korean] language and learning how to write in Hangul…And then

here [at college] I'm a part of the Korean student association which is so different, because it's people who have come from Korea to study here. It's people who come from a Korean family or there's Korean adoptees, so I get a mix of everyone." William noted, "I deferred my graduation to go and study abroad there [in Korea]. So, I didn't really have to do a lot of school work. I just was focused on being Korean, experiencing Korea."

Samantha and Ramona attended Korean culture camp as children, while Abby replied that she first went as an adult. In childhood, Maggie and William described that their contact with Korea or the Korean culture involved attending annual events for Korean adoptees and their families with limited exposure to some food or collectible items. Parker said that he attended children's classes at a local adoption agency monthly for about three years. Ramona and Mike both traveled at least one time to Korea before turning 18. Transitioning into adulthood, Brett expressed his motivation to meet other Koreans in Los Angeles, so he attended political protests once or twice a month. Abby revealed that she has traveled to Korea four times as an adult. Samantha said that she has been learning Korean and is a member of the Korean student association at her college. William told me that he studied abroad in Korea for a semester prior to graduating from his undergraduate studies.

Within the sample, there were several adoptees who attended Korean culture camps, either as children or adults. In childhood, the Korean adoptees recounted heterogeneous levels of exposure to Korea and Korean culture; ranging from annual adoptee events to visiting Korea. It was important to consider that the Korean adoptees were primarily dependent on their adoptive parents to facilitate or mandate their

involvement with Korea-related events, trips, or activities. As adults, the Korean adoptees have also demonstrated some variation regarding their current or past choices to intersect with Korea or the Korean culture; meeting up for political protests, being present for Korean student association events, and even returning to Korea multiple times. Also, it seemed imperative to emphasize that reculturation activities with Korea or the Korean culture may take many different forms and could represent a myriad of different things for each individual. Regardless of age, the participants in the sample portrayed the concept of individual differences when referring to the level and type of exposure to Korea as children and as adults.

Self-Beliefs

The superordinate theme of *Self-Beliefs* described the participants beliefs and attitudes about their adoption and interactions with the Korean culture. The primary sub themes are *About Adoption* and *Korean Culture*

About adoption. Seven of the eight participants shared their beliefs about adoption. Mike voiced, “I honestly don't even know if I'd recommend [adoption] to other people, just because it's just, so painful, it's so strenuous.” Abby noted, “The compelling things [from adoption] are the abandonment issues and anger issues and how that's affected all the things in my [life]. I can't think of one aspect of my life [that adoption] hasn't affected, whether it's my relationships, whether it's my job, my role as a parent, it plays into all aspects of my life.”

Other participants remarked on being different or unique, Ramona said, “I just meant being an adoptee is a positive because we are unique and special beings, we’re unique inside and outside.” Samantha added, “The biggest thing that I've dealt with

growing up was adoption and being different." William joined in this reaction, "I think that's probably the biggest thing...[about] being Korean, being an adult Korean adoptee that's being just different."

Mike reflected that adoption is so painful that he would find it difficult to recommend it. Abby attested how her adoption has pervasively affected her life in multiple roles and responsibilities. Samantha and William both described themselves as different, while Ramona provided a positive connotation with feeling unique and special. Mike and Abby painted a distressing picture of how being adopted has impacted them personally and relationally. Moreover, other participants self-defined their experiences with adoption as special and feeling different. From the earlier entries, beliefs about adoption seemed to coalesce around the tenets that being adoptee separates you and your experience from most people. Almost as if you are a red spot on a white piece of paper. The responses seemed to suggest that adoptees have strong attitudes and stances toward themselves and their adoption histories.

Korean culture. Six of the eight participants from the study discussed their observations or opinions about Korean culture. Maggie commented about adoption for Korean people, "[They] just feel this deep shame and I know that's, again, a cultural thing for them." Ramona shared, "[Korean] society's just now starting the change I feel like with the way that they view adoption." Abby noted, "I guess being born outside of traditional marriage in Korea [in] my life, I probably wouldn't have had probably [as many] opportunities."

The exposure to Korean culture has revealed information about how adoption or adoptees are perceived. Education about the topic has allowed Korean adoptees to

familiarize themselves with the Korean standards of society. Also, the participants demonstrated awareness about how Korean adoptees are generally perceived within the context of their birth country. This acknowledgement appeared to establish an authentic and revealing connection to the Korean culture and country. The observations and beliefs about Korean culture directly connected their cultural norms and standards to the acceptability of adoption. Comprehending the stigma and the resulting outcome of adoption in Korean society may breach the idealized and fantastical way Korea could be perceived.

Social Support

The theme of *Social Support* provided examples of social support that the participants have received across their lifetime. The quotes reflected experiences of general and adoption-specific support. The primary sub themes are *General Support*, *Lacking Support Related to Adoption*, and *Support Related to Adoption*.

General support. All eight of the participants offered examples of how they have experienced social and emotional support from family, friends, and romantic partners. The sub theme is *Family and Friends*.

Friends and family. Abby said, “My husband is my partner in everything as parents and when I had a bad day, he’s the first person that I go to. He's also the person that when I need time and need to escape from all the stresses, he's the person I want to hang out with, he's kind of my safe place.” Ramona commented, “I have my boyfriend [who] is very, very supportive. He's been a huge force in my life.” Samantha shared:

> I would say that my close friends are the people who are really a big support system in my life right now. I have two [or] three really good friends up at

college, and they're always so supportive of all the decisions I make and all the activities I'm in. They're always there for me, especially when it comes to how my mental health is or if I'm missing home and different things like that.

William also noted:

> I have a personal board of directors, [I] call it. I have people in my professional life that [also] spill over into my personal life. They're older people that have found success in some form throughout their life or maybe they haven't, but they're just very brilliant minded people and they can give me perspective and provide me insight. So, I use them. There are 5 of them…and I interface with them frequently.

Mike told me about his adoptive parents, "My parents never had that sort of outlook on education. They've always supported me, but they never were like you have to get an A [or] you have to be a part of all these clubs. They've always just wanted me to do the best I could and they wanted me to give my best effort." Samantha reported, "That's the best feeling in the world when my [adoptive] parents are telling me [that] I'm doing good and that if I need anything that they're always there for me. They're always willing to support me in following my dreams and different things like that. And it's just really amazing." Parker described:

> We're all really close [referring to his adoptive siblings]…We all have very good relationships with each other; where if something happens, I have no problem going to them and explaining if I had a bad day at work like texting, one of my sisters and saying, oh my God, today was a horrible day, and then we'd have a conversation. So, I've always been pretty close to my adopted siblings.

Abby remarked that her husband represented a safe and nurturing space, while Ramona also described her boyfriend as very supportive and impactful. Samantha shared that close friends in college are caring and are committed to helping her when she needs it. William detailed how he leaned on a group of smart and successful people for guidance and perspective. Samantha and Mike reported that their adoptive parents have encouraged them to do their best and have been responsive to their personal goals and aspirations. Parker stated that he seeks out the comfort and support of his adoptive siblings, even if he is having a hard day.

Korean adoptees demonstrated that support can stem from adoptive family members, romantic partners, or friends. Overall, the individuals that were named appear to provide assistance, direction, encouragement, and guidance. The interpersonal connections with these people appear to be dependable and reliable. The formation of these sources of support could be instrumental for maintaining the Korean adoptee's mental and physical well-being. Korean adoptees also appeared flexible and resourceful when finding others to meet their needs and wants. Lastly, being able to count on people for affirmation and support may also counteract the self-beliefs that the adoptees are alone or that no one cares about them.

Lacking support related to adoption. Five of the eight participants noted instances where they did not receive support specifically related to adoption. Abby supplied a reaction:

> Yeah, I tend to just not talk about [adoption] with people…The hardest part of that has been with my [Korean adoptee] sister [and] not being able to talk about it with her. Because growing older I always felt like when we were young. It was

us against the world…when we do talk about [adoption]. I walk away, always feeling not great, not beat up but just kind of invalidated, she's not very accepting of my feelings.

Ramona retold a story about her adoptive mother:

My [adoptive] parents didn't really talk to me about adoption in the healthiest way or at all. My [adoptive] mom actually wrote a letter to my biological mom behind my back, who I hadn't seen or heard from since 2000. She tried to pass it through the adoption agency and said, my daughter is dating this guy…and I hope she doesn't end up pregnant like you. It was so senseless and insensitive. The adoption agency was horrified and luckily stopped the translation and got rid of the letter.

Maggie spoke about her experience after visiting Korea, "I was still very much left to trying to figure that out on my own. I had my therapist, which certainly helped me process all of that and unpack a lot of what I was feeling, but even that felt…I don't want to say inadequate; that's not the right word. It's more that the 45 minutes wasn't enough for me."

Abby stated that when she interacts with her Korean adoptee sister that she generally feels invalidated and disappointed. Ramona reported not only a lack of support, but that her adoptive mother attempted to write and transmit a damning letter to her birth mother without her knowing. Maggie noted that her sources of support were inadequate to process her experience after returning from Korea. At different times, Korean adoptees may undergo instances where they feel unsupported to feeling assaulted by people around them. In addition, critical and seismic events could also create

disequilibrium for adoptees; which may spur feeling vulnerable and isolated. Identifying champions and supporters for adoption-related concerns may be different than identifying individuals and groups for general support. This differentiation process may be confusing or disorienting, particularly if the adoptee cannot depend on members of their adoptive family for love and care. For Korean adoptees who do not receive adoption-specific support, they may face problems with processing notable adoption events, difficulties with validating personal reactions, or feel unacceptable and alone.

Support related to adoption. Seven of the eight Korean adoptees supplied examples that detailed feeling supported regarding their adoption. Brett stated, "[With Korean adoptees there is] that instant understanding of what it means for each other…[We] have a pretty good understanding of what some important things are, like the DNA tests or going back to Korea to search or being in a relationship with somebody who's not a Korean adoptee." Maggie noted a relationship with another Korean adoptee, "[We talked about] how [adoption] shaped us, and how that influenced us, and a lot of it was just, do you ever have that? And it was a lot of, oh my God, yes, I totally do that! But it just felt so nice to have the validation from someone else. So, you don't feel as alone and as isolated and as crazy as you think you are." William shared:

> When I talked to [my Korean adoptee friend] I do get a sense of peace because she understands where I'm coming from and the burden is lifted more once I can talk to her about it. And then she can reflect on it and...then she can give me feedback. And then she can unload on me...about being a Korean adoptee, about her racial identity and those things...she is the one that made [me feel] the most inner peace.

Mike detailed, “Another one is even [my adoptive parents] just taking us to Korea multiple times. I think that it would have been easy for them not to, but they did because I think, again, it was [important to] kind of [have] the transparency. They weren't trying to shun me away... [or say] you should be ashamed.” Ramona said, “My boyfriend supports me on a day to day basis. If there's anything on my mind, [for instance,] when I was sad coming back from Korea and would have these outbursts of just crying and random stuff, he would listen. And he would just talk me through what was going on and if I was missing [Korea] and all of that.” Samantha also reported, “The people I'm in clubs with and stuff, they are super supportive. Like going to the Korean student association anytime I want to talk about...being adopted and being Korean they're always listening and that's [an] amazing support system as well.”

Brett, Maggie, and William chronicled how Korean adoptees have provided a strong source of support concerning adoption. Mike said that his adoptive parents have also demonstrated a strong willingness to bolster his experience with adoption. Ramona cited a specific example of how her boyfriend comforted her as she was adjusting back to the United States after visiting Korea. Samantha recognized that members of the Korean student association are dependable and useful sources of support when she needs to explore questions about adoption. The participants detailed how those relationships can supply shared understanding, validation, and even peace. The interviewees identified other Korean adoptees, romantic partners, adoptive parents, and friends who could play a supportive role with adoption.

It may be helpful for the adoptee to discriminate who can or cannot offer assistance with adoption-specific matters. The participants seemed committed to secure people who could offer an open and soothing environment to discuss adoption.

Adoptee Strengths

The superordinate theme of *Strengths* elaborated on the participant's individual and interpersonal characteristics and abilities. These strengths personified how Korean adoptees can contribute to themselves individually and through relationships in an adaptive way. The primary subordinate themes are *Personal* and *Relational*.

Personal. Seven of the eight participants named and detailed personal strengths. From the interviews, these qualities were discussed in the following sub themes: *Accomplishing Tasks*, *Adaptability*, and *Awareness*.

Accomplishing tasks. Abby described:

> Yeah, I would say quickly in my career, I learned that was a strength of mine. I've always been able to multitask. Although some people will say there's no such thing, but being able to multitask and be[ing] able to really work efficiently and figure out how to do that very quickly has helped me significantly in my career. And I think that was probably why I was good at school [also].

Samantha noted, "I'm very motivated and dedicated to what I do…if you hit a bump in the road, you gotta just keep moving if it's something that's important to you. You gotta strive to achieve it."

Abby relayed how her ability to work effectively and balance multiple tasks has been incredibly helpful in her career and school performance. Samantha referred to how she continues to persevere towards her objectives, even if she encounters setbacks along

the road. For Abby and Samantha, these qualities seemed to aid them with striving for and completing goals. Both women appeared to display confidence when detailing their abilities. Generally, these strengths may also correlate with personal self-efficacy, along with self-esteem and self-worth. Moreover, these qualities may be generalizable within a multitude of settings, roles, and responsibilities. From a broad lens, Korean adoptees may demonstrate a proficiency with identifying and progressing toward their goals, even if they encounter obstacles or other challenges in their way.

Adaptability. Mike presented, "I feel like I had a lot of shoes that I tried on and [had] experiments with, but I really think I'm growing into each one of those shoes and I can wear different type of shoes anytime I want to. And I guess that's kind of the beauty of my story as well." Ramona remembered her experience in high school:

> When I got into choir, I just saw that was a big turning point. That just helped me feel like I belonged and choir was cool because you had all these different kids from all different cliques coming together to sing...And then you'd have some of the more popular jocks whatever people that were coming to choir, just because they liked it and some of the really smart people. And so, it was cool to be in that and I think that helped me really adapt to just different people and groups.

Mike described how experimenting with an assortment of shoes has translated to feeling confident wearing them for different occasions and at various time. Ramona shared how joining her high school choir bolstered her ability to pursue relationships with people from divergent backgrounds. Both examples highlighted how Korean adoptees may metaphorically use different shoes to successfully traverse innumerable situations and requirements. The process seemed to also include being courageous when trying on

the different shoes and seeing how well they fit for different circumstances. Over time, the participants demonstrated flexibility and self-reflection when assessing how well the different types looked and performed. Even after experiencing potential disappointment, there was a willingness to continue trying on different alternatives and noticing success. The process of learning and adapting can also reinforce the adoptees' confidence that they will figure out a successful path, even if the specific context or parameters initially appear challenging or unfamiliar.

Awareness. Brett noted, "I think the true strength, maybe one that I am still developing is figuring out what makes me happy. And what is a renewable source of strength or energy, especially for me, what gets me up [and] out of bed every day and gives me the energy to do things?" Peter said, "I think just growing up amongst so many minorities, I mean the schools that I went to were primarily African Americans in [and I saw] how they were discriminated against or hearing about how unfair things were...how sometimes things [are] harder work for them. And having that knowledge and growing up with that knowledge and then letting that...be a benefit to me." Ramona shared, "Just feeling like I'm sad about what I missed out on [in Korea] even though I love my [adoptive] family here and I love my friends and all that, there's still that wonder and that what if? What if I was not adopted, and I lived in Korea and I spoke Korean and I fit in with my culture...and what would [have] happen[ed]? Would my life be similar, would it not be? There's just a lot of wonder."

Brett and Ramona exhibited an ability to self-reflect and continue to seek answers to personal questions and curiosities. Peter attended to African American peers at school and noted some of the historical and cultural challenges that members of that community

face. The participants demonstrated competence with observing others while also introspecting about their personal thoughts and feelings. Awareness also implies that Korean adoptees have the ability to notice certain personal or interpersonal experiences in the moment. This strength may be applicable when attempting to understand how someone fits within the context of certain cultural and social systems. Korean adoptees could utilize their insights to identify or make meaning of their own or others' needs, wants or reactions.

Relational. Strengths identified within a relational context were noted in six of the eight participants. These attributes were demonstrated through a willingness to assist, connect, and curiously learn about others. The sub themes were *Helping and Understanding Others* and *Openness Toward Others*.

Helping and understanding others. Brett said:

> I'm sure that being a Korean adoptee makes a huge [difference], has a huge influence or colors my approach…I think maybe it's just serving more of a tenderness or more empathy with other people or trying to put myself in their shoes. Because, I was there once, so I can [see] how shitty things can be…just having this grossly traumatic thing happen when I was a baby. I think maybe I'm sensitized to other people's pain a lot more than I would have been."

Maggie offered her experience:

> I think because at least personally, I've experienced lack of empathy from people or a lack of kindness from people, that I try really hard to always present that to other people.

> Or, try to incorporate that into how I interact with people, especially my students, who've all been through their own harrowing experiences because of their disabilities. I do try to come from a place of empathy when dealing with them, particularly.

Ramona also described, “[I like] being a supportive person to other people, helping [to] build them up and pushing them to be the best they can be if there's something that they're striving for. I always am there for people. I would say I am a pretty empathetic person so I can put myself in another person's [shoes], and I try to always understand where someone is coming from.”

Brett, Maggie, and Ramona identified themselves as empathetic and sensitive to others’ well-being. Brett noted that being adopted significantly contributed to his sensitivity toward others’ pain, while Maggie shared her aptitude was based on personally encountering a lack of care and concern from others. The participants were attuned to the emotional experiences of others in general or professional contexts. The Korean adoptees also discussed their process of attempting to understand and meet others where they were. The participants seemed to prioritize the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of other people. Moreover, Korean adoptees appeared capable of orienting themselves towards other people and created spaces where others felt heard and validated. When individuals interact with Korean adoptees, they may feel safe enough to dispel potentially vulnerable and distressing information; which can create opportunities to grow intimacy within interpersonal situations.

Openness towards others. Brett shared a story:

> There's a Korean adoptee Facebook chat group and there are people who come in, who are Korean adoptees. They have strong opinions and talk about things that turn off the other members because they are very negative or they're very accusatory…When somebody's complaining, they're being negative, it's just an expression of who they are…watching somebody complain about life or about the fact of being Korean adoptee or of their [adoptive] family. Instead of seeing that negativity as them being [a] loud mouth... [they are] very naturally expressing whatever hurt or whatever feelings they have inside.

William noted, "I end up spending a lot of time talking about race, though, when the topic does come up, I'm usually one of three at the most, people in the room that can speak to it from [personal] experience." Samantha also responded about being open and sharing herself during an interview in high school:

> I just really remember sitting down and really being able to open up and they had all of these questions, because they didn't really understand the whole process of what my life had been through [with] adoption and how growing up in a mostly white community had affected how I grew up. And so just sitting there, I remember being so happy that someone was so interested in it and that was being shared with the [school] community.

Brett reported an example of being receptive and empathetic toward another adoptees' experience, even if their comments turned off other users. William and Samantha spoke about their willingness to express their personal experiences through the topic of race and adoption. These Korean adoptees made strong and concerted efforts to

be openly attuned toward individuals or openly express their own personal experiences; both exemplars of intra and interpersonal strengths. For some this may seem daunting and overwhelming, but the participants seemed committed to unveiling their own narratives. Choosing to be open and non-judgmental with others may create the space with someone where their true feelings and reactions could be understood and discussed. Also, Korean adoptees who disclose information about themselves may generate openings for reciprocal exchanges of backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs. The opportunity to offer and receive information openly could enable Korean adoptees to demonstrate strong qualities toward understanding and supporting the lives of others.

Summary

When attempting to make sense of the Korean adoptees' experiences noted in the study, the initial words that come to mind are complex, intricate, and within-group differences. Despite having overarching themes that captured similar experiences, it was critically important to honor and understand that each of the individuals collectively represented a variety of perspectives and lived experiences. This variation was noted within all of the primary subordinate themes listed in the results section. The participants in the sample presented a multitude of different ways to cope with their adoption narratives; emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally. The experience of reculturating back to Korea and interacting with Korean people seemed to impact the participants in personally and interpersonally remarkable ways. Multiple identities and the intersectionality of identity demonstrated the relationships between self-identification, the context, and different types of socialization.

There was such a strong response to how Korean adoptees encountered forms of minority distress, their impact, and forms of coping. It was interesting to understand how the experience of being a Korean adoptee was such a strong influence on the development of values and personal beliefs during the interviews. These values were predicated on intra and interpersonal interactions, which were similarly aligned with individual and relational strengths exhibited by members of this group. I was intrigued to hear how Korean adoptees formed and interacted within different relationships through people, places, and times. The participants noted nuanced responses when describing the different sources and forms of support. Moreover, the adoptees specified how their experience of helpfulness and assistance changed when it was and wasn't tied to adoption; and named those sources of that support. The participant's self-beliefs reflected their thoughts and feelings about what it means to be adopted, their birth country, and stances on different issues.

The experiences of these participants were so vast. The thoughtfulness and conscientiousness to reflect and attempt to make sense of experience was very evident. The lasting impacts of being a Korean adoptee ranged from how they related with their personal family to how they chose to interact with themselves. The adoption process shaped their life decisions, values, and goals. The Korean international adoption experience has implicitly connected these and hundreds of thousands of others individuals between multiple cultures, countries, and backgrounds.

Through their stories, it demonstrated how difficult, confusing, and uplifting that process can be. Despite instances of harassment, othering, and outright hate, these adoptees have demonstrated a willingness and ability to persevere. The participants'

acknowledgement and acceptance of self and others demonstrated resiliency and awareness. However, no individual, group, or community can navigate life without the important sources of social support and feelings of belongingness with others, whether that take the form of family, friends, groups, or community. Despite the many narratives regarding Korean adoptees as an exemplar of the deficit model, these individuals have offered personalized examples of how going through arduous battles and at times struggling does not mean that they are not able, motivated, and resourceful.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study utilized an IPA to further understand the shared experiences of Korean adult adoptees. There were eight total participants with ages ranging from 18-45, which also included four women and four men. Each Korean adoptee completed the two semi-structured interviews. Following the interviews and the member reflections, the qualitative data was reviewed and analyzed using NVivo 12 (2019) software. The themes were developed after numerous reviews of the data and adhering to the principles of data analysis suggested by Smith, et al., (2009). Themes were first drawn from the within-case and then cross-case analyses using direct quotes from each individual within the sample. At the conclusion of this process, there were a total of eleven superordinate themes that were identified; these included: *Coping with Adoption; Experiences Around Visiting Korea; Identity; Mental Health; Minority Distress; Personal Values; Reactions to Participation; Relationships; Self-Beliefs; Social Support*; and *Strengths*. Within each superordinate theme, primary and secondary subordinate themes were also developed and they explored the within-group congruence and dissimilarity citing the Korean adoptees lived experiences. The individual Korean adoptee narratives were intricately woven together to form the underlying essence and shared collective reactions.

The discussion section for this paper will include how the results were connected to the initial research questions. Moreover, this aspect of the paper will include study strengths and limitation; future directions, application for clinical practice, and will conclude with my reflections on the research process. I will elaborate on how the results were related to the initial research questions noted at the start of the study. The overall research question was what are the shared experience of Korean adoptees multiple minority identities over the lifespan. The individual and collective data noted by the participants offered many examples of how identity can be experienced and evolve over time. There were notable instances where multiple minority identification was detailed within the themes of intersection of identity, salience of identity, self-identity, and minority distress. Other sub research questions attempted to address Korean adoptee experiences with reculturation/socialization experiences, identity salience, intersectionality of identity, minority distress, and ways in which helpers could facilitate a strengths-based approach when working with Korean adoptees.

Connection to Previous Findings

From the study, Korean adoptees demonstrated flexibility and variety regarding the identification of multiple minority identities, including ethnically, racially, socially, and culturally (Bergquist, 2003; Kim, et al., 2010). Similar to the research conducted by Bergquist (2003), the participants' experiences reflected different degrees of connectedness with the culture of their birth family, adoptive family, and within the Korean adoptee community.

The Korean adoptees shared responses aligned with results by Lee Shiao and Tuan (2008), whose participants reported how different life events or engagements were influential when exploring, questioning, or integrating aspects of one or more identities.

In terms of intersectionality of identity, the Korean adoptees demonstrated similar findings noted by Pearson (2010) and Zhao (2013). Additional contact with minority distress within individual and systemic contexts will be addressed later in the discussion section. The Korean adoptees depicted how multiple visible and invisible identities intersect and are experienced. The shared experiences of the participants also suggested how the environment or context can influence the self-identification of one or multiple identities concurrently or independently, consistent with findings by Pearson (2010) and Zhao (2013). The experiential differences noted within this group symbolized the variety of intersecting identities and awareness of how those identities can be dynamic temporally. The Korean adoptees also explicated their experiences when interacting with and navigating through Korean, White, and
their American worlds.

In terms of identity salience, the results were congruent with past adoptee groups who noted an increased salience of minority identities when they faced feeling othered and discriminated against (Feigelman, 2000; Walton, 2015). However, the shared experiences also suggested that salience of identity may also be influenced by the composition of the people, environment, or setting; regardless of specific instances of marginalization. The narratives noted by these Korean adoptees were similar to results noted by Kim, et al., (2010), where Korean adoptees noted instances of feeling excluded by White and Korean groups. Moreover, Lee, et al., (2010) and excerpts shared by the

participants also suggested that certain life events, such as traveling to Korea or attending college impacted the salience of one or more identities. However, the Korean adoptee participants in this study also detailed how overall levels of social and cultural identity salience was also independent of the context.

Aligned with the research conducted by Langrehr, et al., (2015), the Korean adoptee participants also noted a spectrum of exposure and opportunities to interact with the Korean culture through events and activities in childhood; this appeared to be primarily dependent on the investment and availability of events within their local community. Contrary to Langrehr, et al., (2015), none of the participants noted feeling empowered or in positions of influence when it came to altering the frequency or consistency of these events. Song and Lee (2009) discussed in their research that different socialization experiences can alter or shape the identification of social and cultural identities among Korean adult adoptees. The participants in this study recounted when and how this occurred at different ages, life events, and developmental phases. Song and Lee (2009) also described the different ways that Korean adult adoptees could encounter elements of their racial, ethnic, and cultural background; such as through events, Korean adoptee organizations, traveling, involvement with Korean activities, and seeking support from other minority groups (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008). More specifically, the participants noted the primary reculturation experiences took place in the form of: college (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Meier, 1999), visiting South Korea (Kim, 2013) and meeting up with Korean adoptee peers (Ramsey & Mika, 2013).

Socialization and reculturation interactions for Korean adoptees in Korea has been documented through multiple studies, previous findings noted that participants felt a sense of relief and contentment being with other Korean people or Korean adoptees (Bergquist, 2003; Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Meier, 1999), similar to what members of this sample also divulged. However, the participants in this study disclosed that being in Korea also highlighted feeling different, othered, and even foreign. The participants detailed how visiting Korea prompted many different emotional and cognitive reactions. The Korean adoptee's experience visiting Korea was also shaped by the level of perceived support and the quality of different relationships they had when traveling there.

Bergquist (2003) also noted a myriad of different motivational factors for Korean adoptees returning to Korea, all of these were endorsed by the participants: immersive activities, developing meaningful relationships, and acquiring essential information. The data in this study also included the individual's interactions within Korea and also the post-trip reactions that occurred after returning back to the United States. This information had not been previously detailed. The Korean adoptees endorsed that going back to Korea or other similar socializing events served as the impetus for integrating self-identification, culturally or socially congruent behavior, and personal development (Baden, et al., 2012).

Previous research with Korean adoptees also found that minority stress can be encountered with adoptive family members (Ramsey & Mika, 2011), systemic and cultural norms within the United States and South Korea (Baden, et al., 2012), along with members of other minority communities (Kim, et al., 2010; Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008; Baden, et al., 2012). More specifically, past findings found that Korean adoptees face

invalidating or hurtful comments about their racial, ethnic, and other cultural identities from other Korean people (Lee Shiao & Tuan, 2008), this was noted in Korea and in America from the current study. Also, Randolph and Holtzman (2010) noted within a sample of Korean adoptees that instances of minority distress can disrupt self-beliefs and increase levels of distress, which was commonly described in this study as well. Zhao (2013) and Pearson (2010) discussed how instances of minority distress can influence intersecting identities for individual international adoptees.

One area of research that had not been previously studied was the collective experience of Korean adoptees facing minority distress; their personal reactions when it occurred, and the phenomenological examples of how that altered multiple visible and invisible identities. Additionally, no prior research has specifically captured and addressed Korean adoptees coping with instances of minority distress. The Korean adoptees in the sample demonstrated proactive coping strategies, primarily independently, but with some examples of seeking out interpersonal support (Langrehr, et al., 2015). Within this sample, there were descriptions of what subjective maladaptive coping looked like and how those events negatively impacted the Korean adoptees' sense of self and self-esteem during and following minority distress encounters.

During the interviews the participants addressed how they socialized with elements of their cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. The interviewees generated specific examples when they interacted with other people of color, including other non-adoptee Asian people, similarly to what was found by Lee Shiao and Tuan (2008). Moreover, there were numerous examples of how Korean adoptees sought out and developed interpersonal connections with other adoptees, a characteristic previously

observed by Ramsey and Mika (2011) and Baden, et al. (2012). Previous research suggested that the formation of relational connections with other Korean adoptees was based on shared experiences, group identity, or the exchange of individual differences (Becker, et al., 2005), similar to what was noted within this study. The participants also detailed the formation of relationships with Korean and non-Korean adoptees, recalling helpful and positive experiences. Also, the adoptees described instances when they encountered negative or neutral reactions when connecting with other adult adoptees. Very few of the Korean adoptees in the study cited family, adoptive parents, or friends as sources of support, as previously noted by (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007) and (Barcons et al., 2012). The participants did not establish direct ties with other Korean adoptees or other minority groups after being confronted with instances of minority stress. However, the Korean adoptees mentioned that the shared instances of minority distress were a factor when seeking relationships with other Korean adoptees or other people of color.

Participants also disclosed the impact of their absent relationship with birth family members. Some of the adoptees recalled feelings and thoughts about missing information about their biological lineage, wondering about the well-being of birth family, and also curiosity about their medical history (Docan-Morgan, 2016). Differing from previous research, the participants also shared specific ways they attempted to cope with the continuous loss of their biological roots, such as rationalizing why a reunion had not occurred or sharing the emotional pain and yearning from the absence of those ties.

The narratives revealed important insight into how Korean adoptees attempted to create a symbolic or actual relationship with biological family; despite the absence of a physical or social connection. The participants depicted specific ways the initial relinquishment process remained salient many years later.

The Korean adoptees also divulged how they have coped with being an international adoptee. This elaborated on the research by Grotevant (1997) and Meier (1999) who noted that Korean adoptees felt rejected, expressed the loss of their birth country and culture and language; and recounted their lack of information about biological family members. However, the participants expressed mechanisms of coping that impacted them adaptively, neutrally, and maladaptively. These coping styles included cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tools to make sense of their adoption narratives. The Korean adoptees who endorsed mental health concerns made direct connections between their pathology and being adopted. Some of the participants shared symptoms of anxiety and depression, that was congruent with past literature that linked adoptees with psychological pathology (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2007). However, less than half of the participants endorsed symptoms of mental health or substance abuse in the study.

Strengths of the Study

There were numerous strengths and contributions that have accumulated from the shared experiences of the Korean adult adoptees in this study. When speaking about the design of the study, the utilization of qualitative methods and analyses was critical for empowering the individual and group experiences. This seemed particularly pertinent regarding the elaboration of meaning making and introspective processes identified by

the participants regarding dynamic concerns. Moreover, the semi-structured interview protocol allowed for flexibility and freedom to investigate the research questions and additional relevant information. The procedures for recruiting and sampling potential participants worked smoothly and efficiently. Reaching out to adoption organization, agencies, and social network groups were effective ways to engage Korean adoptees within the research process.

The integration of Zoom for completing the interviews provided strong benefits for accessing Korean adoptee participants who lived throughout the United States. This expanded my ability to include greater variation in the sample. For the data analysis and organization, NVivo 12 (2019) was extremely helpful with thematic analysis and connecting quotes from the adoptees to super and subordinate themes. The exploratory approach facilitated the data collection process that captured the shared experiences of Korean adoptees through an extended assemblage of topics and life events.

The procedures within this study provided the opportunity for new scholarly information to be documented through the interviews. Starting in order from the results section, this was the first research study that generated information about how Korean adult adoptees have and are coping with their adoption. These strategies appeared in explicit and subtle ways. Coping included individually and collectively with others, the participants cited acceptance, minimizing emotion, and simply searching for answers. The Korean adoptees highlighted how pervasive the adoption narrative can be in shaping the relationship with themselves and the world around them.

This is the first study that detailed the comprehensive journey from beginning to prepare for Korea to their experiences in Korea and with the Korean people, noted their reactions to leaving Korea, and how their trips back to the United States impacted them individually and collectively. The reculturation experiences of returning to the birth country can hold so much importance and value. The testimonials of the Korean adoptees provided common threads and themes, along with vast variation in terms of reactions, interactions, and circumstances. These could be important considerations for Korean adoptees and their families when and if they choose to visit their birth country. The emotional, cognitive, and behavioral force voiced by the participants seemed to encompass the potential to be incredibly uplifting and devastating.

The Korean adoptees' shared experiences also included the intersectionality of multiple social and cultural identities. These included identities reflecting race, ethnicity, adoptee, gender, physical appearance, and sexual orientation. Moreover, there was a designated section where the Korean adoptees remembered experiences as children and adults encountering their White world. The Korean adoptees generated incredibly valuable and honest accounts of how they confronted those moments. Moreover, these examples attempted to encapsulate how multi-faceted and complicated the interplay between multiple identities and the environmental context could be. It also served as a reminder that the Korean adoptees were incredibly aware and attuned to themselves and their general surroundings in related to self-identification and salience of self.

In addition to intersectionality, this was the first study that explored the malleability of identity. Not only within the context of facing individualized or systemic oppression, but also within their local communities, White spaces, and Asian spaces. The

Korean adoptees recalled critical content that further addressed how the salience of visible and invisible identity can co-occur and be quickly altered by the environment. These moments seemed even more relevant for Korean adoptees based on their levels of socialization within a bevy of different cultural and social systems. Moreover, some of the Korean adoptees also addressed how certain identifiers remained generally constant and fluctuations were not dependent on their overall surroundings.

From the data, we learned about instances of minority stress that Korean adoptees have and continue to deal with. This was not the first study that addressed minority stress with Korean adoptees, but it was the first that detailed those shared experiences and how Korean adoptees dealt with the distress following those occasions. Moreover, the themes connected the source of minority stress and the corresponding response by the participants. Also, there was a unique section that captured the participants' experiences with personal invalidation regarding one or more identities. This seemed incredibly important, particularly because the stories represented time intervals that began in childhood and continued to occur into adulthood.

The Korean adoptees had the opportunity to disclose their personal and relational values. This had not been previously documented in a research study. The words noted by the Korean adoptees appeared to directly reflect their own adoption path and how that translated to their treatment of themselves and others. This was foundational to recognizing the human quality of these individuals and their guiding principles used to live their lives.

Another critical component of this project was the inclusion of the participant's thoughts or feelings towards me or their general experience in the study. I found it very helpful and necessary to give each of the participants space to share their experience with me at the end of the second interview. I believe the responses helped to inform me and future researchers about the needs of this special population. Moreover, it was novel information that could be useful when developing another study with Korean adoptees, especially if interviews are one of the primary sources for data collection.

The largest section within the results captured the participants' shared encounters with developing interpersonal connections with other people. The data collected provided a new conceptualization of how Korean adoptees create ties with other Korean adoptees and other adult adoptees. This information identified the function and type of connections that Korean adoptees have with Korean people in the United States and in Korea. The recounting of those experiences offered a glimpse into the challenges, successes, and barriers for Korean adoptees when building relationships with Korean people. The excerpts demonstrated an authentic and poignant depiction of what this group faced when engaging with native Korean people, and what support or encouragement could look like.

The Korean adoptees spoke about feeling generally supported. Through the data analysis process, I was able to separate generalized support versus assistance with adoption-specific concerns. The data from the research was again the first of its kind with dispelling how Korean adoptees receive and work through a spectrum of support.

It was invaluable to demonstrate that family and even friends can also be sources of distress for Korean adoptees. This could be relevant when the Korean adoptee is attempting to fulfill their personal or interpersonal needs.

The Korean adoptees reported about their strengths as a group and as individuals, which has never been investigated. As with the reporting of values, representing the strengths of this particular group was very important. The inclusion of a counseling psychology perspective was paramount to offer how undergoing international adoption can also translate to strong and helpful qualities and characteristics. Within this group, the strengths aligned with their shared values; through self-awareness, overcoming obstacles, and completing goals. Moreover, members of this sample also displayed a strong orientation towards assisting or being open with others. These skills and abilities exemplified by the participants could be considerations for current or future educational, career, or social roles that Korean adoptees may enact.

Implications for Practice

Previous research has broadly defined and suggested themes for how to work with adult adoptees. However, to date there are no empirically-based studies that have identified efficacious treatments or interventions for adult adoptee groups (Baden & Wiley, 2007). Corder (2012) identified common concerns for adoptees that may be relevant for therapy services, such as grief and loss, rejection, identity development, depression, relationship concerns, birth searches, and parenting. Baden and Wiley (2007) also noted that adult adoptees may experience and reexperience trauma that are directly or indirectly tied to the initial relinquishment and adoption processes.

The data collected from these participants have provided the first study that has identified coping strategies and mechanisms Korean adoptees utilized regarding adoption and also instances of minority distress. All of the participants shared ways in which they have chosen to cope with their adoption histories and narratives. The results suggested that Korean adoptees have the capacity to develop and enact choices that are subjectively adaptive, neutral, and maladaptive. Taken with caution, the thematic analysis performed included cognitive tools, difficulties processing emotion, and perfectionism; in addition to adaptive ways of coping using intra and interpersonal spaces. Members of the sample also denoted how their adoption had contributed to developing mistrust within relationships, feeling isolated or alone, seeking answers to information and personal meaning. The variety and complexity of these coping styles are important to consider when working with Korean adoptee clients. I would suggest that clinicians not only identify the symptomology, but seek to understand how the presenting clinical concerns could be associated with underlying adoption-related experiences.

Another theme that was addressed within the study was the experience of the Korean adoptees visit to Korea. For the participants, there was a collective narrative that depicted the different stages of the trip, before their arrival, during the trip, leaving Korea, and the reaction to returning to the United States. The shared experiences also portrayed how the expedition to their birth country could produce a myriad of different reactions even before their arrival. Moreover, the Korean adoptees also described depression-like symptoms, feeling alone in their attempts to process their experiences, or experiencing a loss of their Korean heritage and culture following their return back to the United States. Some of the same participants also detailed how the trip aided their ability

to reconcile elements of their social and cultural identities, personal meaning, and even offer a sense of relief. Despite the overlapping and convergent experiences, Korean adoptees may also display nuanced responses to their trips to Korea and they could benefit from having a space to explore and process those moments in a therapeutic setting. Counselors working with Korean adoptees could provide an important space to address their client's concerns prior to leaving, while they were there, and their adjustment following their trip.

For counseling purposes, identifying the sources of social, emotional, and relational support are incredibly important when working with Korean adult adoptees. From the testimonials in the research, these individuals noted a spectrum regarding their level of involvement, engagement, and the strength of relationships with adoptive family members, including siblings. The participants also expressed an extensive range of their current and previous involvement with other adoptee groups and individuals. Commonly, the shared experiences when interacting with other adoptees were feeling safe, comforted, and supported; with a few others noting instances of hesitancy or social drama that also occurred. For counselors working with Korean adoptees, investment in developing the therapeutic relationship around the aforementioned qualities of safety, comfort, and support could be instrumental for client care. In terms of bolstering the person's support network, the therapists may inquire about relationships with other adoptees, family members, friends, and even Korean adoptee specific groups or camps. However, it would be important to keep in mind that some of those possible sources of support may also represent past incidences of minority distress.

In regards to relationships with Korean people, the Korean adoptees noted individual and collective differences regarding their personal interactions. Lastly, the participants shared how they still maintained a connection with birth family members, regardless if they have ever met them in-person. This suggested that the salience of these bonds could be important to explore and process, particularly if there is a prospective birth search, a general interest in seeking a connection, or even openly thinking or wondering about birth family members. For clinical practice, the incorporation of sources of support along with present or absent relationships could offer enlightening and meaningful moments when working with Korean adult adoptees. It seems important for therapists to consider that Korean adoptees could face interactions with Korean people and birth family members that encompass a wide range of positive, negative, and even neutral subjective responses.

Using the framework of intersectionality and minority distress, Baden and Wiley (2007) named concerns with oppression, privilege, and individual differences being critical for counseling adult adoptees. Results from the participants also detailed how they interacted with multiple minority identities. These shared experiences also included the intersectionality of identity within multiple cultural and social systems in the United States and in Korea. The interviewees professed how those moments of contact impacted the salience of identity, self-identification, and personal development. Therapists working with Korean international adoptees may address current and former social and cultural identification. However, the client's self-report may not capture the fluidity of identity or how certain environments affect the salience of those identities. It may also be

helpful for clinicians to be mindful that the prominence of those identities may or may not be influenced by the person's interaction with different settings.

Within the context of minority distress, Korean adoptees referred to events and reactions including racism, personal invalidation, stereotyping, and feeling othered in the United States and Korea. Moreover, the Korean adoptees named specific experiences when this occurred and how they chose to cope. The collective experiences of the Korean adoptees exemplified within-group differences and seemed to capture helpful and unhelpful reactions when faced with minority distress. Within a therapeutic setting, it is critical to be attuned to the potential experiences of individualized and systemic oppression noted by Korean adoptees and be mindful of how that could be generalized to the therapist-client bond. In addition, the clinical presentations of distress may be directly tied to feeling othered and marginalized due to their interactions with multiple contexts and self-identifying with visible and invisible intersecting identities. For clinicians assessing instances of minority distress, it seems important to clarify the aspects of identity that were infringed upon, who was involved, and their response at the time of the event. The Korean adoptees also illustrated different coping strategies they utilized when they were confronted with minority distress in the study; this could also be valuable information gathered by a practitioner when addressing those events in therapy.

The results also provided shared examples of personal and interpersonal strengths noted by the adoptees. For instance, there were themes related to individual characteristics, including adaptability, personal awareness, and the ability to accomplish tasks. Moreover, the relational strengths noted by the adoptees focused on characteristics that benefitted potential connections with others. Korean adoptees demonstrated qualities

that represented a willingness to help and assist others; and an openness toward other people and their perspectives. The themes identify attributes that could complement a strength-based approach versus simply reiterating a deficit model. Clinicians should be aware of their own biases and assumptions about their Korean adoptee clients during their clinical work (Baden & Wiley, 2007). Korean adoptee clients could benefit from support and collaboration within therapy that highlights their personal awareness and their tendency to empathize and understand others.

The participants also described shared values. Depending on the theoretical style or approach, these principles could be incredibly important and valuable to increase insight around. The study noted how Korean adoptees identified a collection of individual and relational values. Approaches may use this information to guide Korean adoptees regarding their personal wants and needs, while also highlighting if or how those are currently being fulfilled. The values noted by the adoptees could potentially be helpful for personal growth and development, along with the cultivation of healthy and genuine connections with others. Despite these values not being applicable for every Korean adoptee, the data offered possible avenues for further inquiry in clinical settings. Moreover, identifying barriers or obstacles to attaining those personal and relational needs could provide therapeutically relevant data for underlying personality structures, defenses, along with cognitive and behavioral patterns.

Implications for Training

The results from this study have important application for informing the training of practitioners who are working with Korean adult adoptee groups, couples, and individuals. In the article noted by Baden and Wiley (2007), they offered some

suggestions on how to provide "adoption-sensitive" counseling for adult adoptees, not specifically for international or even Korean international adoptees. Some of these tenets included: identification of practitioner biases and attitudes towards adoption or adopted people, the incorporation of social and cultural identities, political procedures, and the economic implications of adoption practices. Baden and Wiley (2007) emphasized the importance of connecting adoptee clients with relevant literature, and building communal sources of emotional and social support.

In a study of adult adoptees from varied cultural and racial backgrounds, Baden, et al. (2017) found the top presenting concerns for therapy in the sample were: depression, anxiety, self-esteem, family issues, and relationship problems with a significant other. From the current study, all of the clients noted depressive symptoms, while only four of the eight identified symptoms of generalized or social anxiety. When reviewing the collective themes from the results, there appeared to be many sources to which those symptoms could stem from: general coping style regarding adoption, visiting Korea, identity development and formation, minority distress, interpersonal relationships, self-beliefs, and sources of support. The participants' complex and intricate themes necessitate training regarding how these and other experiences may be reciprocally contributing to the reasons for why Korean adoptees attend therapy. The clinician should be competent to explore temporal, relational, and personal factors that could be contributing to the subjective distress noted by the client.

One common priority when working with Korean adoptees was the formation of a strong therapeutic relationship. Receiving training on rapport building seems paramount for this sub-population, particularly through the use of empathy, validation, and

demonstrating a non-judgmental stance. Committing to developing this bond was notable based on the common experiences offered by the participants, including difficulties with feeling alone and establishing trusting relationships; instances of feeling othered or oppressed; and at times feeling a lack of support concerning their adoption. Some of the adult adoptees shared how the interviews offered an important space to reflect and express their experiences in a validating environment; other individuals commented on the interview being a safe and comfortable space to discuss their narratives. These qualities directed by the Korean adoptees appear extremely relevant for clinicians to be aware of and exhibit when working with this group. These comments reinforced how imperative it is for counselors to receive supervision and training when observing and processing the relational dynamics that occur in the therapist-client dyad. Didactic seminars should also address how cultural and systemic forms of oppression, along with their adoption histories could shape the therapeutic alliance. Because of these experiences, the Korean adoptee clients may form beliefs, attitudes, and views that could be perceived as resistance and being uncooperative.

Congruent with the building and developing a therapeutic relationship, further exploring and noticing client' relational patterns and connections could be important (Corder, 2012). Training could address the observation and awareness of noticing these patterns with the adoptee, but also how to directly address this in the therapy room. Moreover, the clinical supervisor could support how these observations could be brought up with the client and their potential benefits for the clinical work. Through the therapeutic relationship, these insights and cycles could be applicable for the Korean adoptees' interpersonal patterns outside of therapy. Not only could these insights be

personally helpful, but they could translate into skills and confidence that complements their personal values and strengths. Receiving didactic and clinical training concerning how to raise these observations and collaboratively work with the Korean adoptee client are areas that could be addressed and relevant for counseling.

Using the Coping with Adoption theme collected from the participants could also inform training and education for clinicians working with Korean adoptees. Collectively the Korean adoptees subjectively expressed strategies that appeared helpful and unhelpful related to their adoption histories (Corder, 2012). These included cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills. Regardless of the coping mechanism or theoretical orientation, education around the cyclical nature of certain mechanisms and its associated level of distress or chronicity of concerns could be an area of importance. For some clients, there may be an overreliance on certain tactics and tendencies that with support could be broadened to encompass emotional processing of loss and grief, or the challenging of certain self-beliefs and expectations, or experimenting with new social skills when developing new friends. For therapists, solidifying your theoretical approach and also assessing the client's current cycles and strategies of coping may be essential ingredients for addressing goals in therapy. Also, knowing that Korean adoptees may rely on cognitive or sacrifice emotionally-based ways to identify and process their experiences may also inform individualized interventions. Counselors may benefit from participating in classes or seminars that focus on identifying how Korean adoptees cope and complementary interventions based on the presenting concerns.

The next area of training refers to multicultural and diversity considerations when working with Korean adoptees. Using the article written by Davis, et al., (2018), the authors spoke about the importance of a multicultural orientation (MCO) framework that complements the previous multicultural competencies of knowledge, skills, and awareness. The MCO advocated for cultural humility, cultural opportunities, and cultural comfort for therapists working with clients. For those working with Korean international adoptees, the participants provided many experiences that reflected identity salience, intersectionality of identities, interacting within multiple social and cultural systems, and identity formation/development. Fluctuations with identity may also be impacted by socialization events, such as visiting Korea or spending time with Koreans or other Korean adoptee peers (Corder, 2012). Discussions and case consultation are critical avenues for practitioners to increase their level of confidence and enactment of culturally sensitive and relevant approaches. Literature reviews and workshops may also be helpful to further discuss how to apply the MCO model when working with Korean adoptee clients in counseling.

Not only was identity discussed, but also the prominence of minority distress. The Korean adoptee participants mentioned examples of feeling othered and experiences of racism, stereotyping, and personal invalidation. They also reported on how they reacted to incidences of minority stress as a result of invisible and visible identities. For clinicians, I believe that the MCO model offers important principles and guidelines when exploring the diversity and multicultural experiences of Korean adoptees because of the complexity and intersectionality of identity in relation to setting and context. Moreover, the utility of cultural opportunities and humility has been shown to strengthen the

therapeutic relationship between the client and therapist (Davis, et al., 2018). Moreover, experiences of minority distress may have been the result of personal or systemic forms of oppression due to historically marginalized identities or statuses. Providing a warm, inviting, and supportive environment may increase the client's level of empowerment and validation of the emotional, social, and cognitive behaviors. Training and education about utilizing those interventions and skills that identify and discuss those experiences should be a prerequisite for clinicians attempting to work with Korean adoptees. Counselors who are helping Korean adoptees need to exhibit the competence and confidence to discuss concerns of power/privilege, identity, and forms of minority distress. Lastly, therapists choosing to support Korean adoptees need to have experience and training with addressing potential microaggressions and other multicultural ruptures in therapy.

Research Limitations

Using IPA, I am inheriting limitations with the methodology and the form of analysis. The primary goal for an IPA is to understand the sense meaning process and the development of meaningful experiences within context for a small sample size (Smith, et al., 2009). One limitation of this design was relying heavily on the two semi-structured interviews for data collection and analyses (Tracy, 2010). I lack varied types of data, but was able to integrate multiple participants' views and experiences to develop shared and overarching themes. IPA also emphasizes the use of interpretation through coding and thematic development (Smith, et al., 2009).

Rossman and Rollis (2010) promoted cautiousness and tentativeness when formulating conclusions and findings from interpretative approaches. I plan on being deliberate and prudent with my assertions drawn from the data collection and analysis.

Another limitation concerns the transferability of the findings from the study. I think it would be difficult to generalize the findings to other populations and groups, due to the small and homogeneous sample (Rossman & Rollis, 2010). I intended to address the transferability of the data by selecting a sample that was representative of different age groups, gender, and some variation in their current locations around the United States. The results should be cautiously applied to other Korean adoptees who have grown up in the United States, and may not be applicable for Korean adoptees adopted to other countries internationally. Moreover, the reported themes from this study may not be applicable for a sub-population of Korean adoptees known as Hapa, or Korean adoptees with mixed ethnic and racial heritage. The tentativeness should also be applicable for Korean adoptees who identify as transgender; those outside of the participant age range; or those who grew up in other areas of the United States.

Lastly, all of the Korean adoptees were involved in adoption organization, agencies, or social network groups. There may be Korean adoptees who are not actively involved in any of those platforms whose experiences may contrast with those reported in the study. Moreover, replicating the results may be another potential limitation to this research study. The primary obstacle would be reenacting the dynamic between the participants and me from the interviews.

Not only would this be difficult due to the subjective nature of the conversations and interviews, but due to the participants and I being Korean adoptees (Saeed Al-Roubaie, et al., 2013). Sharing the primary identity of interest with the participants may have played an influential role on shaping the exchange of information and the type of interactions we had.

Future Directions

The results noted by this study appeared to offer tentative and exploratory information about many facets regarding the shared experiences of Korean adoptees who have grown up in the United States. However, the findings also raised additional questions about future directions with Korean adoptee research. Based on the demographic information from the participants, it would be important to further explore the experiences of other Korean adoptee sub-populations, including those who were raised in other countries, those who identify as multi-racial and ethnic, older and younger age groups, and with greater attention toward diversifying sexual orientation and gender identity. Based on the results, completing other studies that look at similar variables for other international adoptee groups could contribute to the scholarly base of information among other multiple minority individuals. Using a multitude of other samples could be useful to gain a comprehensive understanding of the shared experiences of Korean adoptees or other international adoptees with greater variation in identity and background.

Another area that should be considered for additional research would be exploring how Korean adoptees could receive support around coping with adoption. Within this study, there were several different themes developed that appeared to impact the

participants in adaptive and maladaptive ways. Creating clearer links for helping and assisting not only Korean, but also other international adoptees could be helpful and needed. This could be through counseling, care management, and even peer support.

The participants reported their experiences around visiting Korea during the interviews. Obtaining additional information about the long-term impact of visiting Korea could be beneficial for noting the experiences of Korean adoptees within the framework of identity, relationships, and continued socialization. In addition, the data suggested that the visit to Korea can be a foundational and normative decision-making process. Learning about who is or isn't involved with this process could reveal how Korean adoptees could continue to be supported after birth country trips are completed. The identification of resources for Korean adoptees seems necessary given the reported transitions that occurred in the study.

One additional pathway that seems important to investigate are the potential adaptive and supportive features of other adult adoptees. The Korean adoptees in this study noted how relating with other adult adoptees was beneficial and helpful. I would recommend research that further investigates how those interpersonal relationships could be used in a deliberative manner when faced with distress or difficult circumstances.

Finally, one other area for future consideration would be how experiences with minority distress are possibly related to Korean adoptee self-beliefs as multiple minority individuals.

Personal Reflections about the Research Process

The decision to complete a qualitative research study for my dissertation has been incredibly valuable and rewarding. The process of creating and enacting the study has left an indelible mark for me personally and professionally. I have learned how time consuming the process can be for data collection and analysis using interviews as the primary source of data. Even with flexible scheduling by me and all of the participants, it still took significant periods of time to complete the interviews, the transcripts, and leave time for the participants to provide feedback through member reflections. Also, after all of the data had been collected and cleaned it took an extraordinary amount of time for me to review and organize the hours and hours of recordings.

I didn't realize how time-intensive it would be to review the verbatim transcripts, identify possible themes, and then attempt to organize the quotes. There were numerous times where completing the analysis of two interviews from the same person seemed quite straightforward. However, this became extremely challenging when I attempted to consolidate the quotes and themes from multiple participants. At times, it was frustrating to feel grounded in one person's experience and then see that I interpreted information from someone else in a completely different manner. There was a lot of time invested towards balancing the importance of individual differences noted within the sample, while also upholding the traditional phenomenological tradition of capturing the shared experience. I found it hectic to try and find a balance of documenting it within the results section.

Another research process that I learned more about was the personal and interpersonal experience of completing the interviews. I imagined this, but I noticed how interesting and engaging the narratives were. It was incredibly important for me to reserve a section of the interview to illicit feedback from the participants about their overall experience and their descriptions of interacting with me personally. I appreciated hearing the direct feedback from the participants, particularly around the creation of a safe and trusting space and how my actions during the interviews positively shaped their experience. Overall, I found the interviews and review of the transcripts emotionally heart wrenching, uplifting, and overwhelming. These moments during and outside of the interviews helped me reflect how lucky I felt to have the training as both a practitioner and researcher.

Outside of the procedural aspects of the study, I was again reminded of how complex and intricate people are. The participants individually and collectively exhibited examples of how dynamic and multi-faceted the human experience can be. Within the framework of the research questions, the participants offered responses that were rich and fulsome. I felt very lucky to have chosen qualitative methods to ensure the Korean adoptees had the chance to verbally express themselves and their experiential encounters. Moreover, each person supplied narratives about how they interchangeably navigated through an assortment of environments and settings. The Korean adoptees were able to describe their interactions with these contexts and how they traversed them. They showcased a strong ability to introspect on how different events had shaped their own sense of self. This appeared most prominently when the Korean adoptees reflected on how certain events and settings could alter the salience of self-identification. The

colorful and powerful words of the participants provided a seismic depiction of the personal and relational aspects of experience. The adoptees were also able to recall and retell stories from earlier in their lives, which offered a unique glance into the developmental trajectory of the individual and collective group. It was intriguing to notice the overlay of time along with the other dimensions of experience among the interviews.

I learned from the process how valuable feeling validated and accepted by self and others was for Korean adoptees. The shared experiences noted by the participants often pointed to their search for finding others who could relate. The participants showcased the gratifying nature of social bond and connectedness. Particularly for this group, there was a generalized theme around relationships, ties, and supports. Within the context of identity, I broadened my understanding of how contact with invalidation, questioning, and aggression impacted individuals or groups of people. The participants also demonstrated how the process of forming and developing connections was beneficial and necessary.

The narratives from the interviews only reinforced how devastating it was for Korean adoptee children and adults to receive derogatory and minimizing messages about their human experience. In addition to simply feeling self-acceptance and understanding, I also ascertained that the adoptees sought to find others who would openly accept them for who they are. At times, the participants seemed to suggest that there was a mutual and reciprocal aim for finding intra and interpersonal love and solace. This struck me after they spoke about facing multiple systems and individuals who performed acts of oppression and marginalization. Lastly, something that stuck out to me was how resilient

this group of people are. Despite chronic difficulties and struggles, the collective group appeared to reflect determination, achievement, and an aptitude for seeking out awareness and information.

After reflecting about this research study, there are a few considerations that I would have wanted to have done differently. First, I felt at times the wide range of topics and factors somewhat limited my ability to seek out additional clarification and depth to some of the shared experiences. If I were to do it all over again, then I would have probably selected one of the major variables to be eliminated from the interview protocol. Another feature that limited some flexibility within this process was time. I wanted to try and complete the research study as quickly as possible. This likely sacrificed my ability to be as selective when recruiting and choosing the participants. I would have preferred to have some greater variation with participant characteristics, such as rural and urban considerations. Moreover, I wish I had been more intentional about collecting demographic information from the participants at the onset.

Another consideration could have included establishing a comprehensive system for others to identify and examine my data analysis process. Despite it not being a key element of IPA, having other people review aspects of the data, such as the themes or the quotes from the interviews may have increased elements of validity. Also, it may have offered me divergent ideas and suggestions when it came to organizing the information into superordinate and subordinate themes. Having space for potential dialogue about the data would be something I would deliberate about if I were to conduct future qualitative research.

When reviewing the totality of this project, the results attempted to encapsulate the shared experiences of Korean adult adoptees. The quotes and themes represented first-hand reports of these individuals through many different developmental stages, settings, and environments. I have found it to be invaluable and empowering. I am also thankful that I used qualitative methods to capture these moments and narratives. This study has again reminded me about the multi-layered nature of being a Korean international adoptee and what that means for those of us attempting to support, comfort, and relate with this group of individuals. I hope that this study can be a foundational piece of scholarly work that can further the discussion and awareness for the specific needs of this important sub-population now and moving forward.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Advertisement Flyer

Korean Adoptee Research Project

Are you a **Korean adoptee** and…

1. At least 18 years old
2. Were adopted to an American family with at least one adoptive parent who was of a different race
3. Open and willing to share your personal opinions and experiences in 2 interviews
4. Able to understand and fluently speak English
5. Interested in earning a **$30 VISA gift card** for your participation

If you answered yes to all of the questions above, then you may be eligible to participate in a voluntary research study. Please contact Jared Utley, a Korean adoptee, and PhD. student in counseling psychology at the University of Denver for additional details at: Jared.Utley@du.edu.

Please feel free to pass along this flyer to other Korean adoptees who would be interested in participating.

Thank You!

Appendix B: Letter of Introduction Form

SUBJECT: Letter of Introduction for Participation in a Research Study: A Phenomenological Exploration of Korean Adoptees' Multiple Minority Identities

Date [Insert Here]
Dear [Insert Name],

My name is Jared Utley and I am a South Korean international adoptee. I am currently a PhD. student at the University of Denver in the counseling psychology program. For my dissertation research, I am conducting a qualitative research study with Korean adult adoptees and their experiences. I am asking for your permission to post information about my study on your [Insert Site Here]. My research will be focusing on several topics including: multiple minority identities, minority distress, mental health, and socialization experiences. With your help, the completion of this project will help fellow Korean adoptees, their families, adoption organizations, and other researchers.

I am seeking Korean adoptee participants for this study that meet the following qualifications:
1. At least 18 years old
2. Were adopted to an American family with at least one adoptive parent who was of a different race
3. Open and willing to share your personal opinions and experiences in 2 interviews
4. Able to understand and fluently speak English

The participants will complete two audio recorded interviews. The interviews will last for approximately 60-90 minutes each and will focus on personal experiences and reflections. Following the completion of both interviews, participants will also be given a $30 VISA gift card for their time and effort.

If you have any questions about my research study, please email me at Jared.utley@du.edu or text/call my cell phone number (301)-466-1013. I look forward to hearing from you soon. I am also attaching a copy of the research advertisement flyer to this message.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.
Jared Utley, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
Counseling Psychology
University of Denver

Ruth Chao, PhD., Faculty Sponsor
Associate Professor/Department Chair
Counseling Psychology
University of Denver

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

University of Denver
Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: A Phenomenological Exploration of Korean Adoptees' Multiple Minority Identities

Researchers: Primary Investigator: Jared Utley, M.A., University of Denver; Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ruth Chao, Ph.D., University of Denver

Purpose: You are being invited to be a participant in this dissertation research study completed by Jared Utley, M.A. in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in counseling psychology at the University of Denver. The purpose of the study will be to describe the shared experiences related to being a Korean international adoptee.

Procedures: If you participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete two audio recorded one-on-one interviews (60-90 minutes) over the phone, video conferencing, or in-person. The interview will explore your experiences as a Korean adoptee. Moreover, I will ask you to review the transcripts of the interviews for accuracy and correctness following the two interviews. Data collection will be primarily completed through the interviews, so if you wish not to be audio recorded, I will withdraw your name from the study.

Voluntary Participation: Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to continue the first or second interview for any reason without penalty or other benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw, all of the data from your participation will be destroyed.

Risks or Discomforts: Overall, your participation in this research study has minimal risks or discomforts. One potential risk will be sharing information that may be recognizable by other people. In order to protect your confidentiality throughout this process, I will use pseudonyms for your name and remove other identifying information from our conversations. All of the audio recordings and other collected information will be locked in file cabinets or password protected on my computer and stored in a locked room.

Due to the subject areas and interview questions, there may be the potential discomfort with upsetting or distressing feelings. I want you to feel comfortable only sharing information you wish to disclose. You will be able to skip interview questions if you choose. Also, if during or after the interview you are feeling in distress, I will assist you with locating mental health or other adoption support services in your area.

Benefits: By participating in this study, there may be potential benefits to you and other Korean adoptees. For instance, answering the interview questions and offering your experiences may offer emotional relief. Also, following the conclusion of the interviews

and the completion of the research, the findings may offer important information about the Korean adoptee experience.

Incentives to Participate: You will receive a $30 VISA card for participating in both interviews for this research project.

Confidentiality: Any data or participant information collected will be kept secure and confidential. The researcher will ensure the written and audio files will be stored on a password protected laptop. Moreover, the audio and written files will be backed up on an external hard drive that will also be password protected. The electronic or paper information in addition to password protected or physically locked will be held in a locked room. Only my dissertation chair, Dr. Ruth Chao and I will have access to this information. I will use pseudonyms and de-identified information to protect the identities of the participants. Moreover, any additional sensitive or confidential information will not be disseminated outside of the dissertation committee. The research data will be destroyed following the completion of the research study and any academic presentations or publications.

However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. The research information may be shared with federal agencies or local committees who are responsible for protecting research participants, including individuals on behalf of Dr. Ruth Chao.

Questions: If you have any questions about your participation in this study, please feel free to contact Jared Utley, M.A. at Jared.Utley@du.edu or Dr. Ruth Chao at Chu-Lien.Chao@du.edu at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the DU Human Research Protections Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researchers.

Statement of Consent:
Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study. If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

____
Print Name of Study Participant

____ __________
Signature of the Study Participant Date

Appendix D: Demographic Survey

Hi [Insert Name],

Please answer the following questions:

1. What is your full name (Necessary for data collection):
____

2. What is your phone number (Necessary for Contact):_________________________

3. What is your email address (Necessary for Contact):___________________________

4. Were you adopted into a family where at least one parent was of a different race than you? _____Yes _____No

5. What is your age:
____

6. What year were you adopted:____

7. What is your highest level of education:___________________________________

8. How many times have you returned to South Korea since your adoption (if yes, please list when those occurred):____
____
__

9. Have you begun a birth search (if yes, when):_______________________________

10. On a scale of (1-10), how much have you previously interacted with the Korean culture:________________

11. On a scale of (1-10), how much have you interacted with the Korean adoptee community:____________

Thank You for your Time,
Jared Utley, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
Counseling Psychology
University of Denver

Appendix E: Email to Direct Selected Participants

Date [Insert Here]
Dear [Insert Name],

Thank you for completing the demographic survey and the informed consent. I am excited to meet with you and discuss your unique perspectives through the topics of minority distress, socialization experiences, multiple minority identities, and mental health. I truly appreciate your willingness to spend time speaking with me about your life as a Korean adoptee. Please contact me to setup a mutual time to meet for the interview and if you have any additional comments or questions at Jared.Utley@du.edu.

Sincerely,
Jared Utley, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
Counseling Psychology
University of Denver

Appendix F: Interview Protocol Part I

Interview 1:
This will include a formal introduction to the first interview using the (Using Appendix F-the Pre-Interview Script for Interview One)

Researcher: The questions that will be asked will cover areas of: multiple minority identity, socialization/reculturation experiences, and personal meaning as a Korean adoptee.

1. Tell me about yourself.

2. What does it mean to be a Korean adoptee?

3. How do you feel about being a Korean adoptee?
*Follow up: Has this remained the same or changed over time? Please elaborate.

4. How would you describe your personal values?
* Follow up: Where do you think those values come from?
*Follow up: Do you think your values are connected to being a Korean adoptee or not? Please elaborate.

5. How would you describe your level of interaction with the Korean culture?
*If minimal or higher, tell me about a memorable experience when interacting with the Korean culture.
*If none, what has stopped you from interacting with the Korean culture?

6. What has your level of interaction been like with Korean people?
*If minimal or higher, tell me about a memorable experience spending time with Korean people?
*If not, what barriers have kept you from connecting with other Korean people?

7. Tell me about your previous interactions with other Korean adoptees?
*If present, share with me a time that stands out to you
*If none, what has gotten in the way of spending time with other Korean adoptees?

Appendix G: Interview Protocol Part II

Interview 2:
This will include a short follow up period to clarify or add any additional information from the previous interview. Also, it will offer an opportunity to answer any additional questions made by the participants.

Researcher: Did you have any additional information you would want to add from the previous interview? Do you have any questions in general regarding the study?

Researcher: The questions that will be asked will cover areas of: identity salience, minority distress, and strengths-based mechanisms of coping.

1. What influences your awareness of being a Korean adoptee? (Examples may include where you are or who you are with)
*If something, How?
*If nothing, what do you make of that?

2. Tell me about a time when your Korean adoptee identity was highlighted?
*If yes, what was critical for you in those moments?
*If not, tell me about a significant time when you minimized being a Korean adoptee?

3. Have you felt othered due to your race or ethnicity? (Examples include: racism, discrimination, or prejudice)
*If yes, tell me about a time that is particularly memorable for you.
*If none, what would be your reaction if this occurred due to your race or ethnicity?

4. Are there times when you felt othered due to being an adoptee? (Examples include: racism, discrimination, or prejudice) If so, tell me about a meaningful experience when this occurred
*If not, what has protected you from facing this?

5. Have you faced other challenges specifically related to being a Korean adoptee?
*If yes, what do those challenges look like for you?
*If not, what has contributed to your ability to overcome those situations?

6. What are your current sources of support?
*If yes, tell me about a significant time recently when you have felt supported. (Follow up: How did you feel when that happened?)
*If none, how does it feel to lack support?

7. What social or cultural groups do you feel most connected to?
*If yes, what stands out to you when that happens?
*If yes, how does that differ from other social or cultural groups that you don’t feel as connected to?

*If none, what contributes to feeling disconnected from other social or cultural groups?
*follow up: What is the impact of that?

8. What are your personal strengths?
*Follow up: What is a meaningful example of this for you?
*If none, try and tell me about a time when you were feeling positively about yourself.

9. What else do you feel is important to share about your experience as a Korean adoptee?

Appendix H: Pre-Interview Script for Interview One

Researcher: My name is Jared Utley, I am a Korean adoptee and PhD. student in counseling psychology at the University of Denver. Thank you again for agreeing to meet with me to share your experiences and stories as a Korean adoptee.

Researcher: How are you doing today? (Invite them to grab some water or tea or coffee depending on the setting of the interview)

Researcher: I wanted to remind you that there will be two different interviews. The first will cover information related to your multiple minority identities, experiences with Korean people or the Korean culture, and your awareness related to your Korean adoptee identity. The second will explore your encounters with minority distress (racism, discrimination, and prejudice), the importance of your Korean adoptee identity, and how you have coped with obstacles over the course of your life. Also, would you mind if I kept small notes during our two interviews?

Researcher: What questions do you have about the interview? (Reply to questions)

(If they have not previously signed the informed consent) Researcher: I am going to share with you the consent information that lists: the voluntary nature of your participation, risks, upholding confidentiality, and the benefits of your participation. Moreover, it lists the purpose of the study and briefly explains the aims of completing this research. I want to assure you that I will complete procedures that protect your confidentiality in terms of your identity and the experiences that you share with me today. This means password protecting and locking up information from the interviews and using pseudonyms (or fake names) to de-identify you or other individual people named during the interviews.

(If they have not previously signed the informed consent) Researcher: What questions do you have about the informed consent? If none, please sign the informed consent form if you would like to participate in the study.

Researcher: I hope that our conversations serve as a way to uplift your voice and increase awareness of the different Korean adoptee experiences. The interview may evoke difficult or distressing feelings at times and my intention is to be respectful, caring, and curious about your personal narratives and stories. Feel free to take your time or pause prior to answering any of my questions or prompts. Please answer the question as specifically as you can and there are no “wrong or right answers.” Please let me know if I’m not being clear with my prompts or follow ups. There may be times during the interview that I will attempt to seek further information or clarify the answer you have given. It is your full right to choose not to answer a question or a comment that I raise when we are speaking. All of our responses will be recorded, reviewed and typed out carefully. Following each interview, you will have an opportunity to review our conversation and add any comments or edits to the transcript.

Researcher: I want to encourage you to ask questions or provide comments during either interview. Thank you so much for offering to take valuable time to speak with me about your experience as a Korean adoptee. I am humbled to share this time with you. Do you have any questions before we begin (Wait for any responses)? With your permission, can I start audio and/or video recording? Please let me know when you are ready to begin and I will start recording.

Appendix I: Thematic Coding Table

Table 2
Thematic Coding Table

Theme	Participants	References
Coping with Adoption	**8**	**380**
Adaptive Coping	8	57
Personal Work	8	38
Relational Work	7	19
Neutral or Maladaptive Coping	8	323
Abandonment	6	30
Cognitive Tools	8	32
Difficulties Processing Emotion	7	24
Feelings Alone or Isolated	6	37
Impact of the Perception of Others	7	30
Insecurity and Difficulties with Trust	8	35
Perfectionism	5	22
Protecting Self and Others	8	65
Searching for Answers	8	51
Experiences Around Visiting Korea	**8**	**257**
Before Going to Korea	8	24
Reactions to Being in Korea	8	109
Familiarity	8	26
Impactful	8	30
Overwhelming	6	25
Stimulating	7	28
Reactions to Leaving Korea	8	28
Reactions After Returning to the US	8	96
Difficult	8	73
Positive	7	23
Identity	**8**	**364**
Intersection of Identity	8	99
Adoptee Id. and Phys. Appearance	7	20
Ethnicity and Race	5	12
Korean and American	6	28
Intersection of 2 or More Identities	6	18
Intersection with White World	8	21
Salience of Identity	8	136
Asian Spaces and People	8	33
White Spaces and People	6	20
Local Community	7	54
General Salience of Identities	7	29

Theme	Participants	References
Self-Identity	8	129
Adoptee or Adopted	7	10
American	5	5
Korean	6	8
Identity Formation	7	57
Reactions to Being a Korean Adoptee	8	49
Mental Health	**8**	**46**
Anxiety	8	46
Depression	4	25
Minority Distress	**8**	**285**
Feeling Othered	8	29
Based on Race	7	17
Lack of Belonging	6	12
Distress Regarding Invisible Identities	7	23
Distress Regarding Visible Identities	7	29
Racism	7	19
Stereotyped	5	10
Personal Invalidation	6	15
Impact of White or American Society	6	22
Coping	8	167
Negative Reactions	8	129
Positive Reactions	7	38
Participant Values	**8**	**122**
Personal	7	28
Accomplishing Goals	7	14
Work Ethic	5	14
Relational	7	60
Caring	7	33
Relationships	6	27
With Self and Others	7	34
Open and Non-Judgmental	5	10
Transparency and Authenticity	6	24
Reactions to Participation	**8**	**25**
Reaction to General Participation	6	14
Specific Reaction to Me	5	11
Relationships	**8**	**587**
Relationship with Adoptive Family	8	78
Adoptive Parents	8	55
Adoptive Siblings	6	23
Relationship with Birth Family	7	71
Birth Search	5	26
Longing for Connection	5	22
Wondering about Birth Family	7	23

Theme	Participants	References
Relationship with Other Adoptees	8	149
Level of Interaction	7	26
Overall Impression	8	66
Quality of Interaction	7	57
Relationship with Eth/Rac Div. Groups	7	32
Interaction with People of Color	6	17
Lack of Exposure to Asian People	7	15
Relationship with Korean People	8	126
General Impression	8	43
Negative or Neutral Reaction	8	31
Positive Reaction	7	52
Relationship with Korea	8	131
Connection with Korea	7	47
Exposure to Korea	8	84
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