

Biracial Identity Development:  
Narratives of Biracial Korean American University Students in Heritage Language Classes

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**Abstract**

Biracial Identity Development and Heritage Language Learning:

A Case of Biracial Korean American University Students

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Despite the increasing biracial and multiracial population in the United States, there are few studies on the identity development of people with racially mixed backgrounds. This study examines eleven biracial Korean American university students using participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. In particular, it focuses on how biracial Korean Americans construct and engage with their identities, the factors that influence this process, and how Korean heritage language on the higher education level play a role in identity development. The narratives of biracial Korean American university students illustrates the intersection where biracial and multiracial identities are situated, describe how individuals navigate two or more cultures in which race and language are viewed differently, challenge the

existing categories of heritage language, and shed light on identity development in the higher education context.

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## Chapter 1: The Research Problem and Conceptual Framework

### The Research Problem

Because of immigration, the increase of interracial marriages and mixed children, *biracial* is a concept that has been constructed within the last two decades. The increase of the mixed race population from intermarriage raises new questions about simple binary conceptions of race, because binary concepts blur racial boundaries over successive generations (Labov & Jacobs, 1998). Some scholars (Pao, Wong, & Teuben-Rowe, 1997) problematize the term *biracial* because it implies the mixing of two distinct pure racial types, as if there were a strict biological basis for racial categorization (Stephan, 1992). However, racial types, categorization, and concepts are not rigid and constantly change and are reconstructed (Omi & Winant, 1996). Scholars studying mixed race individuals have not reached a consensus regarding the terminology or conventions that we should use in addressing individuals of mixed heritage (Renn, 2003). In this study, I use the words “biracial,” “multiracial,” “mixed race,” “multiple heritage,” and “mixed heritage” interchangeably, as do the authors of the studies cited. Also, I will use terms like “mixed race” interchangeably with the term “mixed-race,” which is hyphenated (along with “half-White,” “half-Black,” “half-Korean,” “half-Asian” and so on). There has been debate and discussion among scholars (Caglar, 1997; Edwards, P., Ganguly, D., Lo, J. 2007) about the use of hyphens for immigrants and mixed race individuals which I will not discuss in depth in my study.

Most research on Korean identity in the United States has been explored through the lens of ethnic identity. Many scholars (Chong, 1998; Danico, 2014; Hurh, 1980; Hurh & Kim, 1984; Kim, Yook & Yum, 2014; Palmer, 2007; Palmer, 2011) examine Korean American ethnic identity in relation to immigration, acculturation, assimilation, and generational differences. The

racial aspect of Korean immigrant identity has been largely overlooked. Scholars Kubota & Lin (2009) define race as “perceived or discursively constructed phenotypical features” (p.5) and ethnicity as a term that encompasses ancestry, language, religion, custom, and lifestyle. Consequently, many scholars use the term *ethnic identity* to describe Korean American identity. However, this term does not describe the Korean culture and how Koreans view race. Koreans view themselves as both a racial and an ethnic entity. Korean ethnic identity and Korean racial identity are inseparable, and nearly interchangeable. In fact, some scholars (Pai, 2000; G. Shin, 2006) argue that Koreans view themselves as a racial rather than an ethnic group. The legitimacy of one’s ‘Korean(race)-ness’ is often determined by the race of the parents, where they were born, their skin color, physical traits, and the language they speak. Given the short history of immigration of Koreans in the United States, first- and second-generation Korean Americans believe that these values are an important part of their Korean identities. This may help explain why Korean Americans have the lowest interracial marriage rate within the Asian American population (Qian & Lichter, 2012), despite the fact that interracial marriages in the U.S. are increasing (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Korean heritage language is an essential component to the Korean American culture and ethnic identity development (Cho, 2000; Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; Danico, 2014; J. Lee, 2002; Kim, Lee, & Kim, 1981; Min, 2000; Yu, Choe, & Han, 2002). Compared to Chinese and Japanese immigrants to the U.S., Korean immigrants in the U.S. - predominantly latecomers who immigrated after the Immigration Act of 1965 - are largely a Korean-speaking group and the language spoken at home is Korean (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 1981). Many of the Korean heritage language schools in the U.S. are affiliated with Korean immigrant churches. Approximately 75 percent of Korean immigrants to the U.S. are affiliated with a Korean church (Min, 2000). For

many Korean Americans, perpetuating the Korean language and culture is an “integral mission of the Korean American church” (Kim, 2008, p. 116). For this reason, Korean immigrants who do not attend Korean immigrant churches or are not a part of Korean immigrant organizations are less likely to have the same access, resources, and information about Korean heritage language education than those who do. The Korean immigrant churches and organizations offer a place in which Korean immigrants exchange information about Korean camps and Korean heritage language schools, and share cultural material and knowledge. Since many Korean parents of biracial Korean American individuals do not participate in Korean immigrant communities, this further limits biracial Korean Americans from learning the language and culture. Thus Korean heritage education on the higher education level may provide opportunities for biracial Korean Americans to not only learn Korean as a heritage language, but also enable students to attain resources to construct and reconstruct their Korean identities.

Recent scholars of mixed race identity studies (Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008; Rockquemore, et al., 2009; Root, 1990, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2003) take the ecological approach to identity development among the mixed race population. Ecological perspectives describe the importance of environments. Identity development occurs in dynamic environments through interactions with other people. Colleges and universities offer physical, social, and psychological spaces where individuals can explore who they are and educate others about an identity that may not always reflect social norms (Garbarini-Philippe, 2010). The higher education setting is one of the significant environments in which individuals construct and reconstruct their identities.

Although many studies show the importance of the higher education setting in relation to identity development, few studies have been done on the multiracial student population in an higher education context (Garbarini-Philippe, 2010). Consequently, the higher education context and

the heritage language classes provided at the university setting may be an important aspect of biracial individuals' identity development.

In this study, I provide a snapshot of biracial identity development among a sample of biracial Korean American university students, describe the factors that influence biracial Korean identity, and explain the role that Korean as a heritage language learning plays in the identity development of biracial Korean Americans in a university context. Many studies have described the stages and factors of ethnic identity development, the interrelationship between heritage language learning and ethnic identity, biracial identity development, and Korean ethnic identity in relation to Korean heritage language (Cross, 1987; Danico, 2014; Helms, 1990; Min, 2000; Phinney, 1992; Root, 2003; Renn, 2008). However, more research is needed on Korean heritage language learning and Korean American identity development in the higher education environments. Further research is also needed on biracial Korean American identity development and what Korean heritage language learning means for mixed race Koreans. The narratives of the biracial Korean Americans in this study illuminate the complexity of racial identity and problematize race as a social construction in the U.S., particularly as the mixed race population grows. Also, the narratives of the biracial Korean American students may challenge existing categories of heritage language, as the present discourse on heritage language focuses largely on monoracial speakers. Furthermore, the experiences of biracial Korean Americans in this study raise questions about the role of Korean heritage language schools and classes not only for students to learn the Korean language, but also as a safe space to attain resources to construct and reconstruct Korean identities. To better understand biracial identity development and heritage language learning, my study focuses on the lives of eleven biracial Korean American university students. The following research questions guided my study:

- (1) How do individuals feel about being biracial Korean American?
- (2) What do biracial Korean Americans consider as important to their identity construction? What are some of the factors that influence biracial Korean identity?
- (3) How do biracial Korean Americans negotiate and “dance” (Palmer, 2011) with multiple identities?
- (4) Why do biracial Korean Americans decide to learn Korean heritage language, especially in higher education? How do they describe their experiences learning Korean in a university setting?

### Conceptual Framework

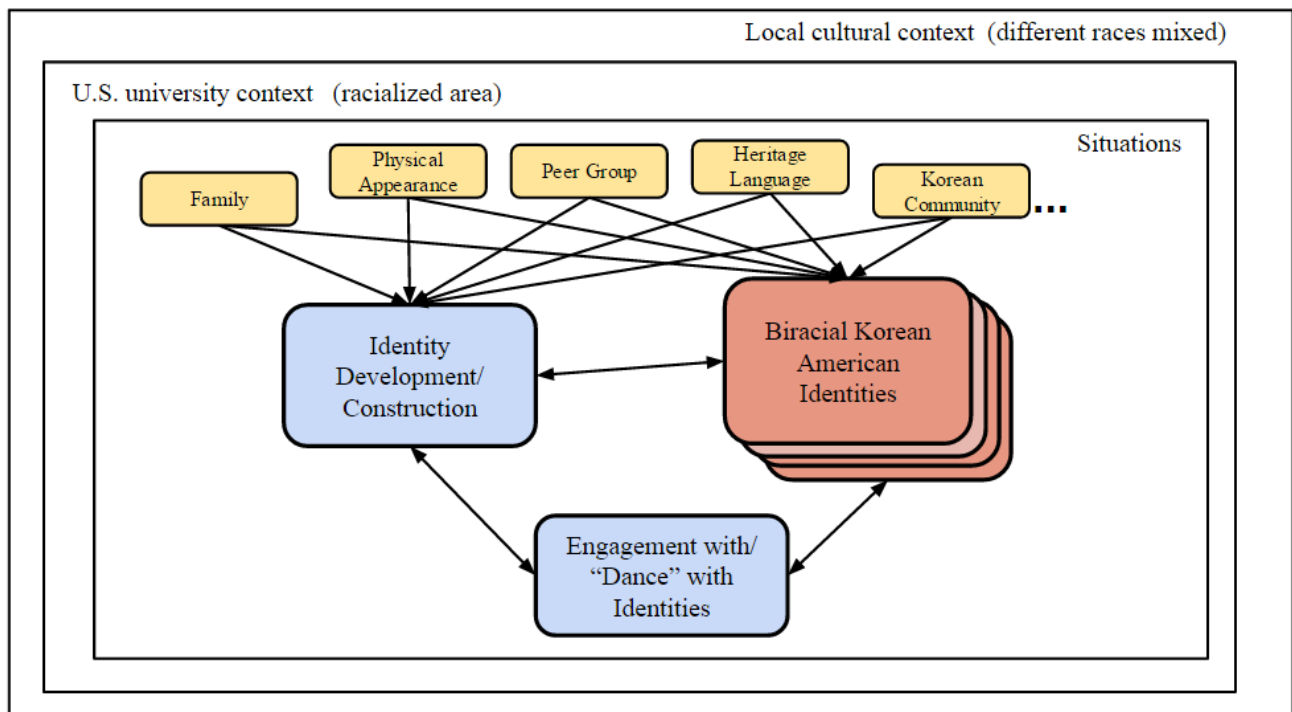


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

As seen in Figure 1, my conceptual framework is based on literature on ethnic identity development and heritage language learning, biracial identity development, and Korean American racial identity.

There are three main concepts used in this study: *Biracial Korean American identities* - The identities of biracial Korean Americans are multifaceted. Although each individual has a different set of identities, and have identities which are more dominant than others, biracial Korean American identity will be viewed as a facet of identity that biracial Korean Americans share. *Identity development/construction* – The identities of biracial Korean Americans are constructed over time as individuals interact with factors such as immigration history, family, heritage language, race, gender, and religion. The concept of identity development shows how biracial Korean Americans have developed their identities prior to entering the university. *Engagement with identities* – Biracial Korean Americans continue to negotiate their identities after they enter the university. This concept presents a snapshot on how biracial Korean Americans navigate their many identities while attending the university. These identities are nestled in various situations such as in a university context where there are students of diverse racial backgrounds, and in the local cultural context in which there is a high population of mixed race people.

## **Framing the Problem**

**Biracial identity development.** To understand biracial Korean identity and the Korean heritage language learning, it is important to examine literature on biracial identity development, ethnic identity development and heritage language learning, and Korean American racial identity.

Race is a social construct that is perceived to be based on biological factors such as skin color, eye shape, hair texture, and facial features. While much of the judgments about race is

associated with visual cues based on physiognomic differences, the ways in which people perceive race is not limited to physical features (Caldara & Vizioli, 2010). Language is closely linked with racial identification. However, language is often associated with ethnicity and culture, rather than race. According to Kubota & Lin (2009a), race, is determined by “perceived or discursively constructed phenotypical features” (Kubota & Lin, 2009a, p.5). Meanwhile, ethnicity is the “politically correct code word for race” (Kubota & Lin, 2009a, p.5) that encompasses ancestry, language, religion, custom, and lifestyle. Just as race is not a construct determined by biological factors, ethnicity does not denote innate or inherent attributes of human being. Both race and ethnicity are relational concepts that sets one group of people apart from another - “a process of constructing differences” (Kubota, & Lin, 2009a, p.4). Regarding race and ethnicity, Lewis and Phoenix (2004) states the following:

“Ethnicity” and “race” are about the process of marking differences between people on the basis of assumptions about human physical or cultural variations and the meaning of these variations. This is what we mean when we say that individuals and groups are racialized or ethnicised...[such] identities are about setting and maintaining boundaries between groups. (p.125)

For the purposes of this study, I will not go in depth in discussing the various definitions of race and ethnicity because studies on biracial identity and biracial identity development shed light on how the boundaries of race and ethnicity are ambiguous and oftentimes, complex. For instance, an individual may be considered biracial in the sense of being of two different racial groups, but the two different racial groups that the individual belongs to may view race and ethnicity differently. The matter of defining race and ethnicity, especially in relation to identity, becomes even complex, multilayered, and dependent on the context. Furthermore, the culture

and context in which the social constructs of race and ethnicity are defined should be examined, rather than the terminology itself. As Bruner (1990) argued, "...it is culture and the search for meaning that is the shaping hand, biology that is the constraint, and that as we have seen, culture even has it in its power to loosen that constraint" (p. 23).

Moreover, biracial individuals and biracial identities bring forth complex issues that are at the cross section of race and ethnicity. Waters (1990, 1996) argues ethnicity is flexible and optional, but mostly for Whites only. She argues that minorities have limited ethnic options because their ascribed race trumps any ethnic status, limiting them to practice their symbolic ethnicity. Waters (1990) and Kibria (2000) argue that Asian Americans, much like White ethnics, are able to transcend racialization as Asian, by asserting particular ethnic heritages and choosing aspects of ethnic culture that they wish to express, while discarding those they do not.

In this study, I explored the meaning of race and ethnicity in the context of the United States and Korea through the life stories of biracial Korean American university students, and specifically how meanings of race and ethnicity are understood in the Korean American context.

***Racial identity development models.*** Racial and ethnic identity theories originally drew on both the social and developmental psychological theories (Jacobs, 1992; Poston, 1990). Developmental psychologists such as Erikson (1968) explain how children and adults change over time, focusing on development that occurs throughout the lifespan. Erikson's (1968) model is based on the assumption that individual identity is formed in a linear and predictable manner, and that individuals typically go through discrete stages of development. According to Erikson (1968), the search for and development of one's identity is the critical psychosocial task of adolescence. The identity crisis of adolescence resolves identities that are imposed by family or

society, and asserts control and seeks out an identity that brings satisfaction, feelings of industry, and competence.

Social psychologists focus on feelings of belonging to a group (social identity) and how one's negotiation of one's social identity influences one's group membership. According to Tajfel and Turner's (1979, 1986) social identity theory, people categorize into groups first, and then identify themselves within a certain group. The central hypothesis of social identity theory is that group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group in order to enhance their self-image. Social identity theory proposes that a person has not one "personal self", but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. An individual has multiple "social identities" in which her self-concept is derived from perceived membership of social groups. Social identity theory suggests that people identify with groups in ways that maximize positive distinctiveness. Groups offer both identity (they tell us who we are) and self-esteem (they make us feel good about ourselves). There are three mental processes involved in evaluating others as "us" (or the "in-group" and "out-group"): social categorization; social identification; and social comparison. The research and theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) have had a substantial influence in various areas of social psychology, such as group dynamics, intergroup relations, prejudice and stereotyping, and organizational psychology.

Although prior models of racial identity development (Cross, 1978, 1987, 1991; Helms, 1990) support the significance of identity development for monoracial individuals, most fail to recognize biracial and multiracial identities. Jacobs (1992) and Poston (1990) were among the first scholars to recognize that biracial individuals will develop a racial identity based on the incorporation of different aspects of the race, ethnicity, and culture of both parents. Poston (1990) suggests that biracial individuals will experience conflict and periods of maladjustment during

the development process. Based on the assumption that “individuals with biracial heritage do not establish firm identities,” his model initially focused on biracial individuals’ “marginal identities” (Poston, 1990, p. 152). He presented a linear model for biracial identity development. Poston (1990) described five stages that a biracial individual experience: Personal Identity (Stage 1), Choice of Group Categorization (Stage 2), Enmeshment/Denial (Stage 3), Appreciation (Stage 4), and Integration (Stage 5). Another early model of biracial development was developed by Jacobs (1992) who studied biracial children. Jacobs (1992) found that biracial Black-White children seek to identify themselves with the Black parent but want to possess the qualities of the White parent. Jacobs (1992) proposed three distinct stages of biracial identity development based upon the interviews generated by the doll-play instrument methodology with Black/White biracial children: Pre-Color Constancy: Play and Experimentation With Color (Stage 1), Post-Color Constancy: Biracial Label and Racial Ambivalence (Stage 2), and Biracial Identity (Stage 3).

*Ecology models of identity development of mixed race individuals.* Scholars such as Root (2003), Renn (2000, 2004, 2008), Rockquemore and colleagues (2009) take the *ecological* approach to racial identity development among the mixed race population. Ecology originated as a branch in science of biology that examined an organism and its relationships to its environment. Outside the field and disciplines of natural sciences, the ecology metaphor has attracted the attention of social scientists that started to examine human groups in similar ways (Noro, 2009). In the broad sense, ecological perspectives address the importance of environments. In social science, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993, 2005) developed a conceptual framework of ecology that focuses on the interrelationships between multiple environmental settings, which specifically examines child development.

The Process-Person-Context-Time model (PPCT) that Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993, 2005) designed describes how complex layers of environments affect human development. The *processes* incorporate the dynamic relations between the person, the context of other people, and her ecology. The *person* is endowed with their individual repertoire of genetic, biological, physical, cognitive, emotional, psychological, and behavioral characteristics. The *context* of human development encompasses the interacting systems and social characteristics (family, school, neighborhood, and peers) surrounding the person. He suggested that there were multiple levels, or systems, that comprised a context in which developmental encounters took place between the individual and her environment. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993, 2005), there are five different levels of a person's environment: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem is the closest to her and the one in which she has direct contact (i.e. family, peers, and caregivers). The mesosystem consists of interactions between the different parts of a person's microsystem. The mesosystem does not function independently, but the different people within the mesosystem assert influence upon one another. The exosystem refers to a setting that does not involve the individual as an active participant, but still affect them. The exosystem incorporates decisions that a person did not make, but have bearing on them. The macrosystem encompasses the cultural environment in which the person lives and the other systems that affects her (i.e. economy, cultural values, and political systems). The chronosystem includes the events that transpire in a person's life. Finally, the *time* element of the PPCT model includes the multiple dimensions of temporality and time that are involved in linking the ecology of human development to individual development.

Expanding upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1989, 1993) framework, scholars have been discussing the importance of the environmental settings as it relates to biracial identity. In my

research, I focused on understanding biracial individuals' identities using the ecological approach, analyzing the experiences of the participants using theories of multiracial identity development. Whereas Jacobs (1992) and Poston (1990) describe a linear model of identity development in which an integrated multiracial identity is the outcome, Root (1990, 1992, 1996, 2003) and Renn (2000, 2002, 2003, 2008)'s models propose multiple racial identity outcomes.

Root (2003) coins the term "border crossing" when she presents an ecological approach to exploring multiracial identity. In her four-position model of healthy biracial identity development, Root (1996) describes how an individual resolves "other" status through one of four "border crossings." She identifies these border crossings as (a) having "both feet in both groups" (p. xxi) or being able to hold and merge multiple perspectives simultaneously; (b) situational ethnicity and race, or consciously shifting racial foreground and background in different settings; (c) a decision to sit on the border, claiming a multiracial central reference point; and (d) creating a home base in one identity and making forays into others. Root (2003) suggests that the individual may not necessarily go through a linear model of identity development as Poston (1990) suggests. She proposes that there are dynamic interactions of various factors that lead to the development of identity of biracial individuals (Root, 2003). Root's (2003) model asserts that there are *identity options* that a biracial individual may take and includes the following four potentially possible avenues:

1. *Acceptance of the identity society assigns.* The underlying perception of this resolution is that individuals are born into an identity. Biracial individuals accept the race that society has selected for them. It may be healthy if the individual accepts this identity and has a strong relationship with their extended family of that race, although this identification may be the result of oppression.

2. *Choose a single identity.* Individuals choose to affiliate with one racial group and decides one group to identify herself with, independent of social pressure. The individual is more active in this strategy, and often may face challenges when her chosen identity conflicts with the identity society has selected.

3. *Choose a mixed identity.* Individuals during this level choose to identify with both or all heritage groups, depending on the societal support and personal ability to maintain this identity. This resolution is most healthy if the individual does not change her behaviors across groups and feels equally accepted within both racial groups. It is important for the biracial individual to understand that she is a unique combination of two or more races.

4. *Choose a new racial group.* Individuals who choose this strategy may move fluidly among racial groups but identify most strongly with other mixed race individuals, regardless of specific heritage backgrounds. The biracial individuals may feel most connected with other biracial individuals because they may be able to move between their two racial groups but also stand apart from them and feel strongly about their own biracial identity.

Root's (2003) model of identity options is described in her study of 20 sibling pairs of mixed race individuals. Root (1998) found that biracial siblings who had the same biological parents and were from the same family made different choices in terms of identity. Through packets including an extensive background questionnaire, a body image inventory, a racial experiences inventory, and an identity questionnaire, Root (1998) found that there were experiences that accounted for the differential choices of biracial siblings within the same mixed race heritage family. The four types of experiences that appeared to influence the identity process were hazing, family dysfunction, other salient identities, and impact of integration. Biracial students suffer from hazing - a process that mixed race individuals endure to prove

themselves full members of a racial/ethnic group in which they may have to deny a part of their identities - but “many persons assert that biracial people do not experience discrimination” (Root, 1998, p. 253). Root (1998) suggests that the best way of reducing hazing is to recognize and accept that that is a problem seriously affecting biracial students.

Renn (2000, 2003, 2004, 2008) also describes a non-linear model of biracial identity development. Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993, 2005) “Person, Process, Context, Time” (PPCT) model of human development, Renn (2000, 2003, 2004, 2008) focuses on the ecological factors that influence multiracial identity development. In a grounded theory study of 56 multiracial college students attending six postsecondary institutions, Renn (2004) identified five fluid and non-exclusive “identity patterns” (p. 67) among biracial and multiracial college students. The five patterns that Renn (2008) identified were: (1) student holds a monoracial identity; (2) student holds multiple monoracial identities; (3) student holds a multiracial identity; (4) student holds an extraracial identity; and (5) student holds a situational identity. This fifth pattern is inherent in Root’s resolutions (2008) in which the individual identities differently in various contexts as they take situational identities. Renn (2008) found that students identified with one or more of the five “identity patterns,” and in many cases, the situation or context dictated their identification. *Situational identities* describe a fluid identity in which an individual’s racial identity is stable, but different elements are more salient in some context than in others. Root (2003) and Renn (2000, 2004, 2008) not only echo scholars of race like Jacobson (1998) in describing the “fluidity of race” (p.6) and race as a social construct; they also expand the notion of race as a “floating signifier” (Jhally, S., Hall, S., & Media Education Foundation, 1996, p.1). Additionally, some of her participants identified with the extraracial identity category, in which they deconstructed racial categories and chose not to identify by any one category.

According to Rockquemore, et al. (2009), the recent scholars on mixed race identity have these assumptions: (a) mixed race people construct different racial identities based on various contextually specific logics; (b) there are no predictable stages of identity development because the process is not linear and there is no single optimal endpoint; and (c) privileging any one type of racial identity over another (i.e., multiracial over single-race identity) replicate the essentialist flaws of previous models with a different outcome. Scholars such as Daniel (2001) suggest the possibility for mixed race individuals to refuse any racial identification and instead identify as “human.”

As research in biracial and multiracial identity increases, it is crucial to acknowledge the four possible patterns of mixed raced individuals and their identities: (1) racial identity varies; (2) racial identity often changes over the life course; (3) racial identity development is not a predictable linear process with a single outcome; and (4) social, cultural, and spatial context are critical for identity construction (Rockquemore, et al., 2009). Although the social construct of race is fluid and contextual, racism, racial discrimination, and inequalities persist. Further research is required of mixed race individuals to describe newly patterns of emerging identities within them. As Rockquemore, et al. (2009) argue, “instead of creating ‘multiracial’ as a subset of the already problematic construct ‘race,’ we need to test, expand, and refine theories that explain the current reality of race relations (p.25).

***Factors influencing racial identity of multiracial individuals.*** Scholars have found that the racial identification of biracial children is high optional in contemporary American society (Xie & Goyette, 1997). There is a diverse set of ecological influences that can influence the identity of the biracial individual including phenotype and physical appearance (Khanna, 2004; Renn, 2004; Root, 2003, Wallace, 2003; Wijeyesinghe, 2001); racial acceptance (Xie & Goyette,

1996), family environment (Herman, 2004; Kilson, 2001); generational status and cultural awareness (Xie & Goyette, 1996; Khanna, 2004; Renn, 2008), language (Brown, 2009; Lee, 2002; S. Shin, 2010); and peer group (Renn, 2000; Standen, 1996; Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

Additional factors that influence multiracial identity development include gender, social class, family, age, spirituality, social awareness, and geographical location (Renn, 2004; Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002; Root, 1998, 2003; Shih, et al., 2007; Wallace, 2003; Wijeyesinghe, 2001).

One of the recurring themes regarding ecological factors that influence biracial identity is physical appearance and looks. Physical appearance and phenotype – skin tone, complexion, hair texture, hair color, eyes and nose shape, and other physical features – strongly influences how biracial individuals identify themselves (Khanna, 2004; Renn, 2004; Root, 2003, Wallace, 2003; Wijeyesinghe, 2001). Some biracial individuals desire darker skin so that other people of color will not challenge their racial loyalty (Kilson, 2001). Others darken their skin in order to “prove” their Blackness and fit in with Black peers and friends (Khanna, 2004). Many biracial individuals choose not to identify as multiracial because of how they look and how they are perceived. A report by the Pew Research Center (2015a) shows that only four-in-ten adults (39%) with a background including more than one race considered themselves to be multiracial, while the majority of these adults (61%) did not. Approximately half (47%) of the adults with multiple races in their background who did not consider themselves to be multiracial said that their physical appearance was among the reasons that they did not identify as multiracial. How biracial individuals are perceived by others in society varies substantially by mixed race group. For instance, the majority of biracial adults who are White and Black say they are more likely to be perceived by strangers as Black. On the other hand, an overwhelming majority of White and American Indian biracial adults said they are seen as White. For White and Asian biracial adults,

about one quarter of the group said they are viewed as Asian, while 42% believed they were perceived as White.

Family environment and upbringing is another ecological factor that influences biracial identity development. Through an extensive qualitative study of biracial adults of various backgrounds, Kilson (2001) found that family structure was a part of the identity development process. She found that a larger proportion of fathers of color lived with their wives and biracial children compared to White fathers. Children whose fathers of color lived with the family felt close to them at a significantly higher percentage than children living with White fathers.

Another major factor in mixed race individuals' identity development is cultural knowledge – which encompasses knowledge learned from parents, family, community, and language. Along with physical appearance, questions of authenticity, legitimacy, and assimilation arise in relations to cultural knowledge (Renn, 200, 2004, Wallace, 2003). Biracial individuals who know how to speak a heritage language may be considered to have a “passport into a community of students of color” (Renn, 2008, p. 18). If biracial individuals' appearance is ambiguous or their name or language does not reflect their ethnic identity, they may have a difficult time being accepted by monoracial groups of color (Wallace, 2003). Learning about various aspects of their heritage may arm them with knowledge that will help them feel more confident to identify with previously unexplored aspects of their identity.

Peer culture and friendship groups are a crucial aspect of multiracial students' identity development. Peer culture have been shown to be among the greatest influences on college students, their learning, and their development (Kuh, Hu, & Vesper, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn & Arnold, 2003). Wallace (2003) found that the availability of community of other biracial and multiracial students was important in supporting the

development of multiracial identities. Monoracial peers also play an important role for biracial individuals. In some cases, monoracial friends and peers provide support for multiracial students to explore their different heritage groups and to identify themselves as they choose (Renn, 2004). However, Renn (2000) also found that resistance from monoracial students of color and racism among White students were also an aspect of peer culture that influence biracial individuals' identities. Biracial students experience pressure to be "authentic" in their identities and not appear to reject any one racial identity (King, 2008; Renn, 2004; Wallace, 2001). This kind of peer pressure may also influence biracial students to choose one heritage group over another (King, 2008; Talbot, 2008) as a way to demonstrate loyalty and authenticity. Biracial individuals may tolerate pressure from their friendship groups or peer relationships to prove they belong to a particular racial community.

*The higher education setting and biracial identity development.* When an individual is in her late adolescence, the transition between childhood and adulthood, a central developmental task is understanding identity, or answering the question, "Who am I?" According to Hormuth (1990), the transition from family home to independent living at a university produces significant changes in the ecology of the self, requiring new sources of social support (Lamothe, Currie, Alisat, & Sullivan, 1996) or social identity (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). For students attending a large university, self-identities established over many years within a family system or a particular community are often reevaluated or challenged by the diversity, freedom, and independence of university life and there are many identity options that are encountered (Garbarini-Philippe, 2010). Universities also promote identity development by providing students the opportunity to learn more about their own racial identity development and offering inclusive spaces, groups, classes, and perspectives on campuses (Furr, Bernard, & Nixon, 2012). Spaces on university

campuses including student organizations, and interest housing provide environments in which individuals can explore racial identity and experience racial pride, away from majority group members (Chickering & Associates, 1981). Individuals form meaningful cultural reference groups through integrating with other students and acquire both a personal identity and a reference group orientation (Cross, 1987). Higher education institutions assumed a prominent role as “racial battlefields” (Litere, 2010, p. 119) during the 1960s and 1970s and throughout the establishment of affirmative action, ethnic studies, race, ethnic, and cultural programming and services (Anderson, 2005; Kellough, 2006).

Although many studies describe the importance of the higher education setting in relation to identity development, the multiracial student population in the context of higher education has been rarely studied (Garbarini-Philippe, 2010). It was only in 2003 that the Department of Education complied with the 1997 directive that allowed individuals to select more than one race on official forms. This change gave students “the opportunity to reflect their heritage, provide institutions with a better representation of the composition of student populations, and offer valuable information on multiracial students’ experiences in college” (Kellogg & Niskodé, 2008, p. 97). Prior to 2003, the majority of programs and services offered by higher education institutions did not have the multiracial population in mind and may not have met their needs. For instance, when multiracial individuals choose not to identify with any one racial group, it may have led them to be excluded in recruitment efforts. In other words, when biracial individuals choose to identify with one racial group, they often encounter educational inequalities in primary and secondary schools, and also in the higher education settings, where recruitment efforts target minorities.

Students' development of their racial identities, whether monoracial or multiracial, can be "greatly impacted by institutions of higher education, which are intimately involved in "the production, contestation, and negotiation of racial identities" (Literte, 2010, p. 119). According to Renn (2008), "college campuses are places where authenticity is at stake in daily interactions, student organizations, and even the classroom" (p. 18). Professors, staff, faculty, and other students are not immune from these social stereotypes that associate physical appearances with assumptions about cultural backgrounds (Renn, 2004). Scholars have found that college is a particularly challenging time for biracial individuals (U. M. Brown, 2001; King, 2008, Korgen, 1998; Twine, 1996, Wallace, 2003). College is a major transition for mixed-heritage students as they leave the direct influence of their families and enter an environment in which peer interaction and friendships become especially important. Wallace (2003) states, "Mixed heritage students face unique identity issues within the microclimate of the college campus, where interethnic and interracial group relations take on a heightened intensity" (p. 87). College experiences led many biracial individuals to reconsider and modify how they identified racially, and they left college more firmly grounded about who they were (Brown, 2001). Research has increasingly investigated college students' occupation of multiple identities and the ways that students make meaning of their multiplicity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007).

***Sense of belongingness and identity in higher education.*** When individuals have social identities as a group member, this may verify a sense of belonging and raises one's self-worth. The university context and setting provide a unique space in which students explore, build, and rebuild their identities. In higher education literature, Jaret and Reitzes (2009) examined the student identities and ethnic identities of 652 university students at a diverse, public urban university. They found that how young adults conceive of themselves as college students and the

way they formulate their own racial-ethnic identities relates to their self-esteem, efficacy, and academic performance. In another study of approximately 300 university students, Jordyn and Byrd (2003) found that living independently of her family of origin is one of the developmental challenges that emerging adults face. They found that the university students who resided away from their parents' home used more direct, problem-focused coping strategies and were more likely to have established an adult identity, whereas individuals who resided at their parents' home were more likely to be still in the process of developing an adult identity.

Strayhorn (2012) studied diverse student populations in various college environments, examining the relationship between the students' sense of belonging, academic life, levels of socialization, and student retention. Strayhorn (2012) found that the sense of belongingness is particularly important for students who are at risk, marginalized, and vulnerable such as Latinos, gays, STEM students, Black students, graduate students, and first-year students of color. Hurtado and Carter (1997) examined Latino college students' sense of belonging and found that academic achievement was strongly correlated with Latino students' sense of belonging as well as their membership in student government, sports teams, and religious clubs. In her study of biracial college students, Renn (2000) found that all biracial students expressed the need, desire, and importance of feeling accepted and welcomed in their own space. She stated, "Given the importance in student development and racial identity development theory of having a group of like-others with whom to affiliate, the inability of most Multiracial students to find such a group is cause for concern (p.415). According to Quaye and Harper (2014), it can be challenging and confusing for biracial university students to find a place to meet others, explore issues of identity, find a sense of belonging within the greater university campus, and negotiate participation and belonging among race-based student organizations.

A space of belonging that is university-specific is the fraternities and sororities. The Greek system (fraternities and sororities) and Greek-letter organizations is a social network that provide university students with the opportunity to select a social group with similar preferences and attitudes (Borsari & Carey, 1999). Fraternity and sorority members have a shared set of rules that shape how members view others and how they describe themselves, as well as social boundaries for attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Handler, 1995; Nichter et al., 2006). The Greek houses are generally divided based on gender and race and students may join a racial or ethnic organization such as a fraternity or sorority in order to gain an increased comfort with their identity. The fraternities and sororities may provide students with a strong sense of belonging which may lead to a greater interest in cross-cultural contacts, a better sense of belonging to the university community, and more integration into broader campus life. However, while membership in fraternities and sororities provide a sense of belongingness, they may also be a space for ethnic enclaves to emerge as well as a sense of exclusiveness (Sidanius, J., Van Laar, C., Levin, S., & Sinclair, S., 2004).

**Ethnic identity and heritage language learning.** With changes in immigration and demographic transformations, there has been increasing research in issues regarding race, ethnicity, gender, country of origin, language, and culture as it relates to immigrant groups. Many scholars have been interested in the dynamics, construction, and formation of ethnic identity (Phinney, 1990, 2003; Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; 1986; Tse, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001). According to Phinney (1990), ethnic identity is an aspect of one's social identity that can be thought of as a subjective sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the feelings and attitudes that accompany this sense of group membership. Studies indicate that there are various factors that influence ethnic identity, including immigrant

background/generation, ethnic language proficiency, cultural maintenance by parents and community, and social interaction with peers from the same ethnic group (Phinney, 1989; 1990; 1992; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997).

There is a wide array of literature on ethnic identity and language of the immigrant population. Although not all scholars agree that language is necessary for group identity (Edwards & Chisholm, 1987), language is one of the most frequently cited contributor to ethnic identity (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1990; Hurtado & Gurin, 1995; Miller & Hoogstra, 1992). Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) write that “Ingroup speech can serve as a symbol of ethnic identity and cultural solidarity. It is used for reminding the group about its cultural heritage, for transmitting group feelings, and for excluding members of the outgroup from its internal transactions” (p. 307). In the United States, many studies (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Bashir-Ali, K., 2006; Imbens-Bailey, 1996; Phinney, 1998) reveal the importance of language retention for immigrants (first, second, and later generation immigrants), and indicate how ethnic language and ethnic identity are related. After immigration, knowledge and usage of an ethnic language is significantly less by the third and fourth generations. However, members of some groups, particularly those of non-European origin, maintain a strong ethnic identity independent of language usage (Phinney, 1998). Although much research has been conducted on language as a key factor in forming and maintaining ethnic identity, there is a need to assess how the realities of language shift, language loss, and language maintenance interact with ethnic identity (Tse 1998; Urrieta & Quach, 2000).

There is a large body of research on heritage language acquisition and how it plays a role in ethnic identity formation (Cho, 1997, 2000; Cho & Krashen 1994, 1996, 1998; Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; Feuerverger 1986, 1991; He, 2010; He & Xiao, 2008; Tse, 1998). It is important

however, to understand the concept of heritage language and how heritage language learners are different from native speakers or foreign language learners.

**Heritage language: A working definition.** In the United States, the term *heritage language (HL)* is connected with a huge, heterogeneous population with varying historical and cultural backgrounds (Cummins, 2005; Fishman, 2001; Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001; Valdés, 2001; Wiley, 2001). Heritage language refers to any ancestral language such as indigenous, colonial, and immigrant languages. It may or may not be a language regularly used in the home and the community (Fishman, 2001). Heritage language education has been traditionally aligned with foreign language and bilingual education (Wong & Green, 2001).

According to Wong and Green (2001), separate programs and separate classes within programs have been developed for heritage language learners who have been labeled *native speakers*, *foreign/second language learners*, and *heritage language learners*. The existing linguistic-proficiency-based research assumes that these three types of language speakers are in distinct groups and belong to separate linguistic communities (Doerr & Lee, 2013). A native speaker generally has acquired a language as her first language in an environment in which the native language is dominant in various contexts. A native speaker usually has extensive and continuous exposure to the language and has opportunities to use it. A foreign/second language learner, as opposed to native speakers, learns a language and culture that are not native to them. Foreign/second language learners are usually not exposed to listening, speaking, syntax and culture skills that native or heritage speakers possess. A heritage speaker has a background of the ethnic or immigrant language and has been exposed to the particular language, but did not subsequently acquire it fully because another language usurped the original language (Polinsky

& Kagan, 2007). A heritage language learner has some proficiency in or a cultural connection to that language through family, community, or country of origin.

Heritage language education differs from foreign language education. In public and private K-12 and college education in the U.S., languages other than English are typically considered a foreign language, and students of these languages are considered foreign language learners. Within the US school system, the previously offered foreign language courses are decreasing. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics (2008), elementary and middle schools offering foreign language courses decreased sharply from 1997 to 2008 from 31% to 25% in elementary schools and from 75% to 58% in middle schools. There is no nationwide foreign-language mandate in the United States at any level of education (Pew Research Center, 2015b), and in the past, most of the school systems in the US educational system required high school students to take one to three years of a foreign language course to graduate. However, many schools now do not require foreign language learning as a requirement for high school graduation. Many states now allow individual school districts to set their own language requirements to high school graduation. Foreign language classes are counted in earning an advanced diploma rather than a general high school diploma in many school districts (Roman, 2011). Although the percentage of high schools offering foreign languages between 1997 and 2008 remained steady at about 93%, the languages that were taught were mostly limited to Spanish, French and German (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2008).

Fishman (1999) suggests that heritage language can refer to any “language of personal relevance other than English” (as cited in Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003, p.216). Fishman (2001) identifies three types of heritage languages in the United States: (1) immigrant heritage languages; (2) indigenous heritage languages; and (3) colonial heritage languages. *Immigrant*

*heritage languages* are any of the language spoken by immigrants arriving in the United States after it became an independent nation. *Indigenous heritage languages* are the languages of the peoples native to the Americas. *Colonial heritage languages* are the languages of the various European groups that first colonized what is now the United States and are still spoken here, and include Dutch, German, Finnish, French, Spanish, and Swedish. From the perspective of language educators in the U.S., the term heritage language is usually connected with an endangered indigenous or immigrant language, and an heritage language learner is one who "is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken" and who "speaks or at least understands the language and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and in English" (Valdés, 2001, p.38). Heritage language learners have been referred to as "native speakers" or "bilingual students" (Valdés, 2001, p.38). Recently, heritage language researchers in the U.S. have viewed heritage language learners as distinct from foreign language learners: "heritage language acquisition begins in the home, as opposed to foreign language acquisition which, at least initially begins in a classroom setting" (UCLA Steering Committee, 2000, p. 339). Van Deusen-Scholl (1998, 2003) suggests that there should be a distinction between heritage language learners and learners with a heritage motivation, which aligns with Carreira's (2004) labels of "HLL1" and "HLL2." Carreira (2004) also states that a definition of heritage language learners has to take "identity, language and family background" into consideration (p.18).

In K-12 schools, Wong and Green (2001) divide heritage language students into three major categories of: (1) students who are new arrivals or migrants; (2) foreign-born students who arrived at a young age but have lived in the U.S. schools for several years; and (3) U.S.-born students of immigrant and indigenous ancestry. They state that the type of program a student is placed in depends on different factors, including length of time in the country, nation of birth,

proficiency in English, academic achievement, availability of a particular heritage language course, and student interest and needs. They also suggest that there is a need to develop heritage language programs at the K-12 level separate from foreign language learning and bilingual education.

Despite the vast literature on heritage language, the definitions and categories of heritage language are based largely on monoracial individuals who are “full heritage” (Caldas, 2008; Kanno, 2003; King & Guanza, 2005; Lee, 2002; Tse, 2000). Relatively few studies (De Souza, 2006; Pao, Wong, and Teuben-Rowe, 1997; Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000) have examined heritage language learning by mixed race individuals. Pao, Wong, and Teuben-Rowe (1997) investigated the role that language and educators play in supporting positive identity development in mixed-heritage students. The authors divided the participants into two groups based on acceptance or nonacceptance of the minority culture in their upbringing. They found that the acceptance of the minority culture allowed for a more positive self-identity, whereas nonacceptance sometimes resulted in feelings of isolation from both cultures. They found that language is one of the most important and powerful influences on identity development for mixed heritage individuals and native-like mastery of the languages of both heritages is key to a positive sense of self.

For the purposes of this study, I will refer to Shin (2010)’s definition of heritage language. In her study on mixed race individuals and heritage language, Shin (2010) found that her participants had a partial connection to a minority language through an immigrant parent but their proficiency in that language ranged from minimal to high. She uses the term *heritage language* to refer to the minority language spoken by the immigrant parent. This was possible because Shin’s (2010) participants had one English-speaking American parent and one

immigrant parent. However, unlike Shin's (2010) study, the participants in my study were limited to having one English-speaking American parent and one immigrant parent. Rather, they will be second-generation American citizens, but will have one immigrant Korean parent and one parent that may or may not be of an immigrant background. This complicates the term *heritage language* because a biracial Korean American who has one immigrant Korean parent and one immigrant Chinese parent may have two (or more) heritage languages: Korean and the different dialects of the Chinese language (i.e. Mandarin, Cantonese, dialects of different provinces). Because my study focuses on Korean heritage language, I will use the term *heritage language* to refer to the Korean language spoken natively by the immigrant Korean parent. This is not to disregard the other languages spoken by the non-Korean parent that are considered a heritage language, nor is it to ignore participants who may claim half of their ancestry through their English-speaking American parent.

***The importance of Korean heritage language in Korean ethnic identity.*** Compared to Chinese and Japanese immigrants to the US, most Korean immigrants came to the U.S. after the Immigration Act of 1965. Hence the Korean Americans in the United States are mostly first- or second-generation Korean immigrants. Many scholars have examined the generational differences and the ethnic identities of Korean Americans. For instance, Palmer (2007) found different immigration generations in the U.S. attempt to define who is an "authentic" Korean and who is an "authentic" American. With the increasing Korean immigrant population in the U.S., first generation Korean immigrants try to gain recognition of a Korean and American bicultural identity, as they view second generation immigrants as "sell-outs" and "White wannabes." On the other hand, second generation immigrants viewed first generation immigrants as "foreigners" while trying to gain recognition for their American identities.

There has been a growing body of literature, on the relationship between the Korean heritage language and Korean ethnic identity development. Korean Americans are largely a Korean-speaking group and for many Korean Americans, the language spoken at home is Korean (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 1981). Kim et al. (1981) reported that 99 percent of the Koreans living in Los Angeles' Koreatown, New York, and San Francisco use Korean as their primary language. This is because Korean Americans who socialize or work primarily with Koreans may find little need to speak English, especially when business transactions, social activities, and community functions are conducted within the Korean community (Danico, 2014). Research indicates that first-generation adults tend to maintain and preserve their language and ethnic culture, while second-generation adults consciously succeed in a partial assimilation into the dominant culture (Cho, 2000). However, unlike European "White" immigrants, many Korean Americans "come back to search for the language of their parents as well as their lost identity" (Kim et al., 1980, as cited in Cho, 2000, p. 371).

In the United States, there are two national organizations that provide support for Korean heritage language education: the National Association for Korean Schools (NAKS) and the Korean School Association in America (KSAA). NAKS is a non-profit organization that was established in Washington, D.C. in 1981 and oversees about 1,000 Korean heritage language schools. The KSAA was established in 1982 and supports approximately 182 Korean community schools. In California alone, there are several hundreds of such schools - about 300 in Southern California and 80 in the Bay Area (You, 2011).

There have been many studies that describe the importance of the Korean language in the development of a Korean ethnic identity (Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; J. Lee, 2002; You, 2005). In a study of 40 second-generation Korean American college undergraduate and graduate students, J.

Lee (2002) found that cultural identity and heritage language proficiency were strongly correlated; the higher the heritage language proficiency, the stronger one identified with Korean culture and the American culture. The analysis also showed that the participants who were more proficient in the heritage language tended to be more bicultural. J. Lee (2002) suggests that in order for individuals to experience the benefits of their bicultural identities, it is “imperative that we...make provisions to promote the teaching of heritage languages” (p.132). You (2005) examined young Korean children enrolled in Korean weekend schools and found that weekend heritage language schools played an important role in ethnic identity development. In his focus group interviews of four Korean American children in Phoenix, Arizona, he found that maintaining the heritage language was important to Korean American children in terms of helping them to acquire a positive ethnic identity.

H. Jo (2001) conducted a year-long ethnographic study of the Korean language classes at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where there is a large second- and 1.5-generation Korean American population. She found that becoming an English speaker does not necessarily lead to a loss of ethnic identity, and that learning Korean (a ‘heritage’ language) does not necessarily mean having a homogeneous ethnic identity. H. Jo (2001) concludes that the continuous self-evaluation of students of their own language performances interacted with their sense of ethnic identity.

Kang and Kim’s (2012) study examined the interrelationship between Korean heritage learners’ perceived (self-assessed) competence and actual competence in Korea in relation to their ethnic identity orientation. Kang and Kim (2012) studied 30 second-generation Korean American participants via questionnaires on their language background, ethnic identity orientation, and self-assessment of their speaking and writing skills in Korean. They found that

there was a strong correlation among the subjective and objective assessment of the heritage learners' Korean language skills and their Korean ethnic identity. They also found that heritage language learners who have a strong Korean identity tend to have better competence in Korean.

***The role of Korean immigrant churches in Korean heritage language learning and Korean ethnic identity.*** Korean heritage language education often takes place in Korean communities serving more than one million Korean immigrants in the U.S. (Yu, Choe, & Han, 2002). A study conducted by Lee and Shin (2008) indicates that there were approximately 1,200 Korean heritage language schools in the United States in 2008, with approximately 60,000 students enrolled. Most Korean heritage language schools are organized and operated by Korean Christian churches (Lee & Shin, 2008; S. Shin, 2005; Sohn, 2000). As Min (2000) explains, this is because about 75 percent of Korean immigrants to the U.S. are affiliated with Korean immigrant churches (Min, 2000). Min (2000) states that “the Korean community seems to have far more ethnic language schools than any other Asian community mainly because of Korean immigrants' high level of affiliation with Korean churches” (p. 325). Scholars found that the Korean American church is a place for the rediscovery of ethnicity and engage in ethnic activities (Chong, 1998; Hurh & Kim, 1990; Min, 1993, 2000; Oh, 2007). Chong (1998) echoes this view stating that the Korean American churches are the “primary site of the cultural reproduction of the second generation” (p.259). Korean language education is community centric because of the lack of Korean language education in general formal educational settings, and Korean immigrant churches often are the ones who offer Korean language education through Saturday or Sunday schools (Danico, 2014).

Korean churches are unique in that they play a role in sustaining Korean ethnicity. Although the most popular religion in Korea is Buddhism, the religion that most Korean

immigrants in the United States practice is Christianity. Protestantism was first introduced in Korea in the late 1880s, but Korean immigrants to the U.S. have significantly “Koreanized Christianity” and striven to preserve the Korean subculture and identity through the Korean immigrant churches (Min, 1993). J. Kim (2008) states that the phenomenon of the Korean church is in fact extremely unique. Although there are many German American Christians and Chinese American Christians, it is hard to find German American or Chinese American churches in any city that numbers over 1,000. (J. Kim, 2008). Min (1993) describes that rather than being a religious place of gathering, Korean immigrant churches have been more focused recently on “offering the Korean language and cultural education for second generation children and providing social status for Korean adult immigrants” (p. 1371). Min (1993) systematically analyzed the social functions of Korean immigrant churches and presented four main functions: providing fellowship for Korean immigrants; maintaining the Korean cultural tradition; providing social services for church members and the Korean community as a whole; and providing social and social positions for adult immigrants.

The focus of Korean immigrant churches to help immigrants maintain Korean cultural traditions and their ethnic identity may lead to resistance to assimilation into American culture by Koreans whether related to generational differences or racial changes in demographics. Kim (2008) finds that there are “Korean American churches that have thousands of members in Los Angeles, Anaheim, Baltimore, New York, and other cities who speak only Korean and preserve Korean ways” (p. 115). While focusing on retaining the Korean culture and identity, Korean churches may not be tolerant of those who do not fit into the Korean traditional norms. Although Korean immigrant churches in the U.S. may play a key role in providing a sense of belonging and a “primary site of the cultural reproduction of the second generation” (Chong, 1998, p. 259),

it is also a site where the Korean ethnic group's "defensive and often highly exclusive ethnic identity" (Chong, 1998, p. 259) is developed. Although more Korean ethnic churches are trying to embrace a multiracial and multicultural congregation, there are many challenges to implementing a multiracial church model while satisfying the cultural needs of Korean Americans and non-Korean Americans (Dhingra, 2004).

**Korean American Racial Identity.** The importance of race and racial identity development of Asians in the United States is highlighted in the phenomenon of interracial marriages of Asian Americans and multiracial Asian children. Despite the growth in overall interracial marriages in the United States and optimism of the implications, interracial marriages among Asian Americans are decreasing. According to the Pew Research Center (2012), from 2008 to 2010, the percentage of Asian American newlyweds who were born in the United States and who married someone of a different race dropped nearly ten percent. Meanwhile, a separate study by Qian and Lichter (2011) found that Asians are increasingly marrying other Asians, with matches between the American-born and foreign-born jumping to 21 percent in 2008, up from seven percent in 1980. Moreover, even within the Asian American population, Korean Americans were found to have the lowest interracial marriage rate. Specifically, there is a "paucity of material on Korean interracial marriage" (Kitano and Chai, 1982, p.75) let alone biracial Korean Americans. Kitano and Chani (1982) also argue that there is a "general ignorance" about Korean interracial marriage due to the "scarcity of written work about the Koreans in general, which in part is based on their relatively small numbers and newness of their migration" (p.75). For this reason, examining Korean identity, Korean American racial identity, and what this may mean for biracial Korean Americans in the United States is crucial.

Korean American racial identity is constructed at the intersection of Korean ethnic identity, Asian American racial identity, and Korean racial identity (how the Korean culture views race). Korean ethnic identity and Korean racial identity are inseparable, as Koreans view themselves as a race as much as an ethnic group. In this section, I will describe Asian American racial identity and Korean racial identity. I have discussed Korean ethnic identity in the previous sections.

*Asian American racial identity.* A number of scholars that have examined and theorized racial identity development of minorities in the United States. Atkinson, Morten and Sue (1979, 1989, 1998) proposed the Minority Identity Development (MID) model and Sue and Sue (2003) later revised the MID to the Racial and Cultural Identity Development Model (R/CID). Cross and Fhagen-Smith (Cross, 1971; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001) presented the Black Identity Development model, while Helms (1990, 1992, 1994) offered the White Identity Development model. Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) proposed an alternative to White identity development models which they termed the White racial consciousness model. Other minority identities were explored as well. Ferdman and Gallego (2001) theorized the Latino identity development model, and Horse (2005) proposed the American Indian identity development model.

These identity development theories laid a foundation for Asian American racial identity studies to emerge. According to Tatum (1997), like many racial/ethnic groups, Asian Americans started to reconsider their racial identity during the Civil Rights Movement and the rise of identity politics in the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s, researchers began to construct stage models of Asian American racial identity.

One of the earliest researchers to study Asian American identity development is J. Kim (1981, 2001), who proposed the Asian American Identity Development Model (AAID). There are three basic assumptions of this model. First, White racism is an integral part of Asian identity development because racism is pervasive and has a significant influence on the way Asian Americans view themselves. The second assumption is that an Asian Americans may develop an identity conflict “as a belief in his or her own inferiority...perhaps coupled with deep-seated feelings of self-hatred and alienation” (J. Kim, 2001, p.70). J. Kim (2001) argues that because the Asian cultural norms are centered on collective values, Asian Americans may be unduly influenced by external images and the social environment. The third assumption is that for the psychological well-being of Asian Americans, they should adopt positive racial identities and replace the negative racial identities through the process of identity conflict. Asian Americans must consciously work to unlearn and challenge the previously adopted negative messages and stereotypes and transform them into constructive, growth-enhancing ones. J. Kim (2001) states that “the psychological well-being of Asian Americans is dependent on their ability to transform the negative racial identity they experience as a result of identity conflict” (p.71) Based on these three assumptions, J. Kim (2001) proposes a five-stage identity development model of Asian Americans: the Ethnic Awareness Stage; the White Identification stage; the Awakening to Social Political Consciousness stage; the Redirection stage; and the Incorporation stage.

The Asian American Identity Development model (AAID) is criticized by some scholars for being linear, and because it assumes that the negative racial identity in the initial stage of the model moves to a positive and comfortable racial identity in the final stage. The model appears to be promoting a pan-Asian racial identity and treating all Asian American groups similarly. Despite these criticisms and limitations, J. Kim’s (1981, 2001) model is important because it

focuses on the racial identity development rather than the ethnic identity development of Asian Americans. Although J. Kim (2001) acknowledges “the existence of real cultural diversity among Asian ethnic groups” (p.81), it is her belief that “much of what influence AAID is Asian Americans’ status as a racial minority in the United States and the social and psychological consequences of this status” (p. 81). Regardless of their respective ethnic identities, Asian Americans are perceived and treated based on a similar set of racial stereotypes and prejudices that victimizes all Asian Americans. J. Kim (2001) asserts “[i]t is their racial membership, not their ethnic membership, that impacts how Asian Americans feel about themselves in this country” (p.82).

Several different types of Asian American identity models have been proposed. Recognizing that identity development theorists and researchers masks the important differences across Asian American groups, Ibrahim, Ohnishi, and Sandhu (1997) developed a South Asian immigrant identity model. Nadal (2004) proposed a Filipino American identity model that consists of six stages. Building on the work of previous scholars, Museus, Vue, et al. (2013) considered historical refugee contexts and the interconnectedness of multiple factors of identity to construct a Southeast Asian American identity model.

***The Korean racial identity (how the Korean culture views race).*** Korea has taken pride in the fact that it has been a *danil-minjok* (homogeneous nation state) since the birth of the country. There are many nations founded upon this notion of a homogeneous country including Japan, Vietnam, and Germany. For Japan and Germany, the idea of a homogenous nation-state was used as a way to build an industrialized, powerful nation. Countries such as Korea or Vietnam used the ideology of homogenous national identity to recover national pride and reestablish the political authority of the once-colonized country (Jager, 2003). According to K.

Kim (2007), Korea is a *daminjok-geukga* (multiracial nation), but has always believed it was homogeneous. As racial formation theory (Omi & Winant, 1994) suggests, racial formation is a process of historically situated *projects*. The change in demographics in Korea due to globalization brought about many racial projects on the macro-social level in the political spectrum as well as the micro-social level that asserted Koreans as the dominant race.

Historically, Korea has been a society open to diversity. King Kim Suro, the king of Korea's Gaya Kingdom (43-532), married Heo Hwang-ok, who was a princess from northern India. King Seok Talhae of the Silla Dynasty (57 BC-935 AD) was a non-Korean from Russia's Kamchatka peninsula. International marriages can also be found in myths and legends of Korea such as the Tale of Cheo Yong (Choi et al., 2009). According to Frankl (2008), prior to the Japanese colonization, the Korean culture was not bounded to the concept of homogeneous nation; rather, it was open and tolerant to other ethnic groups and cultures. For example, during *Samguk Sidae* (Three Kingdoms of Korea) (57 BC-668 AD), identities were found mostly in the dominant religion, Buddhism. Consequently, regardless of your race or ethnicity, the sense of belonging depended on religious affiliation. Meanwhile, Jeong (2005) states that in the early Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392), 170,000 of the nation's population (approximately 8.5%) were from the countries of China, Japan, Malgal, and Georan.

According to historians, the We-Other dichotomy first came about during the Mongolian invasion during the Goryeo Dynasty Period (918-1392). Many history books were written during this period to resist the invasion and to recover the nation's pride. The ideology of "homogeneous" Korea as a political *project* appeared after the Japanese colonization of the nation. According to Schumid (2007), the word *minjok* (race/ethnic group/people) appeared only after 1905, when Korea's national sovereignty was deprived by Japan. Nationalists at the time

emphasized *gukhon* (the spirit of the nation) as they tried to fight for the independence of the country. According to K. Kim (2007), the term *danil-minjok* [homogeneous nation] appeared much later in Son's (1948) book '*Guksa Daeyo*' (History Compendium).

More recently, after independence from Japan, the construct of race and the salience of racism came about after the 1950-53 Korean War. There were many orphans and biracial Koreans born to Korean women and fathered by American soldiers. There were an increasing number of foreigners that migrated to Korea after the mid-1990s, but attention to biracial and 'multicultural' Koreans surfaced again only after 2006. Because of the half-Black, half-Korean athlete Hines Ward, who was nominated in 2007 for Super Bowl MVP, the term *damunhwa* (multicultural) quickly spread throughout Korean society via media outlets. By 2007, there were one million foreigners in the nation, which constituted approximately two percent of the population.

The change in demographics in Korea brought about many racial projects on the macro-social level that affirmed Koreans as the dominant race, especially in the political spectrum. There were two major waves of immigrants to Korea that contributed to the rapid increase of foreigners in the nation. The first wave started in 1993, where foreign migrant workers moved to the country for the Industrial Trainee System. Most of them were male, and in 2007, the number of migrant workers was approximately 700,000. There are an increasing number of migrant workers that are starting families and raising their children in Korea. The second wave of immigrants started in the mid-1990s, which resulted when Korean men married female migrants from other countries. This is primarily due to the imbalance in the sex ratio, low birth rate, and an ageing society. The number of international marriages grew so rapidly in 2005 that a third of marriages in rural areas and 10% of all Korean marriages were international. The marriage

migrant phenomenon started with rural bachelors, but now is common among lower-class urban Korean males. However, despite Korea's *Gukjeokbeob* (Nationality Act) that states that Korean citizens are defined as those who were born of Korean parents, adoptees, or those who have obtained citizenship through naturalization – the idea of a homogeneous Korea and the *sunhyeol-ju* (pure blood theory) are strong in Korean society.

As racial hierarchy and ideologies of White supremacy exist in the United States, Korea has also developed a similar idea; 'Korean supremacy' is determined by 'Korean' skin color, physical features, phenotypical traits, and language. The racial hierarchy created in Korea puts *Koreanness* as dominant, and other national and cultural groups as secondary. Since the rapid change in demographics, *Koreanness* has shifted from social dominance to hegemony. An invisible institutionalized system of racism has slowly begun to develop. Discrimination towards non-mainstream Koreans is interwoven with ethnic discrimination, country discrimination and 'lookism'. Hence biracial individuals from a White parent and Korean parent are considered superior to biracial individuals from a darker-skinned Southeast Asian parent and Korean parent. As Lipsitz (2006) wrote about Whiteness, *Korean-ness* slowly gained presence in the Korean culture, especially after the Korean War. Lipsitz (2006) argued that Whiteness is a socially constructed identity, an ideology created for distribution of wealth, power, prestige, and opportunity. Lipsitz (2006) claims that Whiteness has cash value, and is possessive as property. Parallel to the Whiteness Lipsitz (2006) described there has been a *Korean-ness* in Korean culture. Having a Korean skin color, physique, phenotype, physical features, etc. created a *Korean-ness* that then was translated to racial privilege, racial hierarchy, practices of elitism, and exclusivity. As Burton and colleagues write, "racialization, or the assignment of racial meaning to real, perceived, or ascribed differences among individuals or groups, produces hierarchies of

power and privilege among races” (p.445). The racialization and the racial hierarchies then form a base where “racism, discrimination, and the perpetuation of inequality in a society and within families” (p.445) stem from.

It is important to understand the history and change of race in Korea for various reasons. First, the Koreans view themselves as a racial group rather than an ethnic group (Pai, 2000; G. Shin, 2006). The legitimacy of one’s ‘Korean(race)-ness’ is often determined by the race of the parents, where they were born, their skin color, physical traits, and the language they speak. Second, the ability to speak Korean is a key to being accepted in the Korean community and is one way to “prove” that you are Korean. Koreans also have a strong sense of pride and superiority over all Asian groups, and they highly value socioeconomic success. In fact, Korean ethnic nationalism is so prevalent in modern Korea that this political ideology and form of ethnic identity is coined “racial nationalism” (G. Shin, 2006, p.223). It was only recently with the demographic changes in the nation since the 2000s that Koreans accepted the notion of biracial Koreans. In fact, before 2011, the Korean government banned biracial men from active duty and serving in the Korean military (H. S. Choi, 2009).

***Colorism in relation to Korean racial identity.*** Deeply linked with the concept of the ‘Korean race’ is the notion of skin color. The work of Glenn (2009) regarding colorism is useful in interpreting the importance of skin color in the Korean cultural context. “*Colorism* is the allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one’s skin” (Burke, 2008, p. 17). Scholars such as Hall (2005) have discussed colorism as a source of internal differentiation and inequality among people of color. The practices of colorism tend to favor lighter skin over darker skin as indicated by a person’s appearance as proximal to a White phenotype (Hall, 2005). Echoing this thought, Hunter (2005) describes colorism as a once hidden

form of within group discrimination. She argues hair texture, eye color, and facial features as well as education and income also affect perceptions of who is considered dark or light skinned (Hunter, 2005). Colorism beliefs and practices operate both within and across racial and ethnic groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2009).

In Korean culture, lighter skin has always been preferred to darker skin; skin color hierarchy is not new. Historically, lighter skin color was more desirable to darker skin color as marriage material because it represented the status of the person. This was because if you were an aristocrat, you would stay indoors studying and memorizing books and wore clothes that covered your whole body. The servants, however, would spend the days outside in the sun which darkened their skin (Rondilla & Spickard, 2007). Throughout history, there have been expressions indicating preference for lighter skin tones such as “skin like white jade” or “porcelain skin.” In fact, *sal-saek* (literally meaning “flesh/skin color”) was commonly used for a light pink/light peach hue in most crayons and watercolor paints until it was petitioned against by the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) and was changed to *sal-gu-saek* (“apricot color”) in 2004 (Kang, 2014).

The tendencies for Korean Americans to marry people of Chinese or Japanese descent in order for the partner or children to “look Korean” may be interpreted in the analytical lens of colorism theories. The notion of skin color is directly related to the acceptance within the Korean society and the opportunities that are available to the individuals. In other words, when marrying non-Korean partners, Koreans preferred to marry people with similar skin color and physical features. In fact, much like Bonilla-Silva’s (2009) model of a tri-racial system with Whites, Honorary Whites, and the Collective Black, a similar model can be found in the Korean culture. The Korean tri-racial system would be comprised of: Koreans, Honorary Koreans (people of

Chinese or Japanese descent that can be “granted” a Korean status), and the Collective “Dark” (those of which who have distinct skin color, features, or physique as do Koreans). People who are White regardless of their ethnicity and nationality would fall into the second class of the Honorary Koreans within the Korean culture. Pyke and Dang (2003), in an ethnographic study of Korean and Vietnamese immigrants, described how intraracial oppression, referred to as “Whitewashing,” and internalized racism severely limited families’ access to resources such as economic networks for acquiring wealth (Zhou, 2004).

At the same time, however, in the American society, Korean Americans are aware that it is very “economical” to be White, as Whites hold higher paying jobs. As Glenn (2009) points out, skin color is linked to social mobility as individuals and groups are ordered and compete in terms of access and ability to use symbolic capital in a status paradigm. In other words, as much as Korean Americans are aware of the racial hierarchy within the Korean culture itself, they are also attentive to the racial hierarchy in the greater American society. Thus even when considering interracial marriages, the “racial pyramid” exists for Korean Americans.

Colorism within the Korean culture is not limited to monoracial individuals. In fact, within the biracial and multiracial Korean population, this is even more evident. Biracial and multiracial Koreans are also stratified by skin color with lighter skinned biracial Koreans doing better than darker skinned Koreans. With more mixed Koreans present in Korean society and more shades of skin color that Koreans have, the Korean population could be projected to be moving away from the tri-racial system to a racial classification of that similar to Latin America.

Biracial Korean identities have been gradually accepted in the Korean culture, but the history of racial exclusivism is still very prevalent. Given the short history of immigration of

Koreans in the United States, first- and second-generation Korean Americans' views on Korean race and Korean language are important to their Korean identities.

## Chapter 2: Design and Methods

I used the approach of narrative methodology as the main framework to guide this study. Narrative methodology enabled me to investigate the meaning of being biracial Korean American and the experiences that contribute to identity.

Narrative is an interpretive approach in the social sciences and involves using storytelling methodology. Stories or narratives are “the oldest and most natural form of sense making” (Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002, p. 66). By studying and interpreting narratives, researchers can describe the individual identity and systems of meaning and further gain access to the individual’s culture and social world (Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, T., 1998). This is because a primary way individuals make sense of experience is by stating it in narrative form (Bruner, 1990; Gee, 1985; Mishler, 1986).

The use of stories as data, specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in a story form having a beginning, middle, and end, is key to this type of research (Merriam, 2009). According to Riessman (1993), narrative analysis takes the story as its object of investigation, and the purpose is to see how respondents make sense of events and actions in their lives. In other words, the story itself is the object of investigation in narrative methodology. Bruner (1987) explains that narratives “segment and purpose-build the very events of a life” (p.15) in a way that people become the autobiographical narratives by which they tell about their lives. Some scholars distinguish narrative methodology, narrative research, and narrative inquiry because they perceive *narrative research* as more of a broader term and *narrative inquiry* as a specialized term (see Clandinin, 2007). I do not go into discussing the substantive and substantial differences of each term; rather, for the purposes of this study, I will use narrative methodology, narrative methods, narrative research and narrative inquiry interchangeably.

Researchers in narrative methodology state that personal narratives are people's identities (Bruner, 1991, 1996; Fisher-Rosenthal, 1995; Gergen, 1994, Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Hermans, Rijks, Harry, & Kempen, 1993; Josselson & Lieblich, 1999; Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2007; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1991, Rosenthal, 1997). Lieblich and colleagues (1998) coin narrative methodology as narrative research and "life-story research" (p. 2). According to these scholars, stories chronicle life and present an inner reality to the outside world while shaping and constructing the narrator's personality and reality (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2007). Personal stories represent human needs, wants, and goals that connect the present self to the past and the future (Adler, & McAdams, 2007, p. 98). The "story *is* one's identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold through life. We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell" (Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, T., 1998, p. 7).

Furthermore, narrative perspectives embrace the fundamentally social nature of the self. Each life story that is told and lived is situated and understood within larger cultural, social, and institutional narratives (Caine & Estefan, 2011). In fact, Adler and McAdams (2007) describe that personal narratives are "largely drawn from a menu of available story options provided by their culture" (p. 99) and are collaboratively formed through social interactions as well. Work on life narratives provides access to people's identity and personality because people create stories out of the building blocks of their life histories and culture. Private narratives which are connected with a community of life stories generally "deep structures" about the nature of life itself (Reissman, 1993, p.2). Narratives enable people to construct their lives and provide them with meaning and goals, and tie them to their culture.

One of the underlying assumptions of narrative inquiry is that there is not one single, absolute truth in human reality. Another underlying assumption of narrative research is that there is no one correct reading or interpretation of a text. The narrative approach is oriented towards pluralism, intentionality, relativism, subjectivity, holism, contextuality (Holloway & Freshwater, 2009). Patton (2002) explains that the philosophy of hermeneutics, which emphasizes interpretation and context informs narrative studies:

Hermeneutics provides a theoretical framework for interpretive understanding, or meaning, with special attention to context and original purpose...Hermeneutics offers a perspective for interpreting legends, stories, and other texts...To make sense of and interpret a text, it is important to know what the author wanted to communicate, to understand intended meanings, and to place documents in a historical and cultural context. (p.114)

Researchers in narrative inquiry state that a life story that is provided through an interview is one instance of *the* life story, which is a hypothetical construct. A life story is a “personal project that is developed in adolescent and worked on throughout the rest of the life course” (McAdams, 2001 as cited in Adler & McAdams, 2007, p. 98) and personal narratives change over time. Not only do life stories develop and change through time, but each obtained story is affected by the context within which the narrated. Thus, *the* life story, can never fully be accessed in research. To this regard, Lieblich and colleagues said, “When a particular story is recorded and transcribed, we get a “text” that is like a single, frozen, still photograph of the dynamically changing identity” (p.8). Hence the particular life story that is obtained in the interview may be one of the “polyphonic versions of the possible constructions or presentations

of peoples selves and lives” (p. 8). Narrative researchers argue that life stories are always related to the context (Josselson, et al., 2007). Clandinin (2007) asserts that narrative inquiry:

...raises a set of questions, about power (Who owns a story? Who can tell it? Who can change it?), about authority (Whose version of a story is convincing? What happens when narratives compete?), and about community (What do stories do among us?). These are questions about philosophy, but even more, they are questions about method...the challenge now is to enter conversations with the rest of our communities to develop a method—a way of talking and asking and answering and making sense—that will allow narrative to flourish in this congenial moment for stories. (p. 30)

The methodological approach of narrative analysis “examines the informant’s story and analyzes how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity” (Riessman, 1993, p.2). Riessman (1993) states that there are five kinds of representations in the research process we must be aware of: (1) attending to experience; (2) telling about experience; (3) transcribing experience; (4) analyzing experience; and (5) reading experience. Narrative analysis recognizes that meaning is ambiguous as it arises out of a process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst, and reader. Unlike historians who work with archival materials, researchers who collect personal narratives can ask informants what they mean by what they say. Language used in interviews “can be scrutinized - “unpacked,” not treated as self-evident, transparent, unambiguous-during the interview itself as well as later, in the analysis of interview transcripts” (Riessman, 1993, p, 32).

Narrative methods are different from traditional approaches to qualitative analysis in several ways. Traditional qualitative analysis often fractures texts in order to interpret and

generalize by taking bits and pieces and snippets of a response edited out of context. They eliminate the sequential and structural features that characterize narrative accounts (Riessman, 1993). However, in narrative analysis, a teller in a conversation takes a listener into a past time or “world” and recapitulates what happened in the past to make a point, often a moral one (Riessman, 1993). In qualitative interviews, “typically most of the talk is not narrative but question-and-answer exchanges, arguments, and other forms of discourse” (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). Qualitative researchers often attempt to depict others’ experience with fragmented information and overlook the representation. For example, feminists emphasize “giving voice” to previously silenced groups of women by describing the diversity of their experience, but as Riessman (1993) argues, “we cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpret. Representational decisions cannot be avoided; they enter at numerous points in the research process” (p.8).

In qualitative sociology, there are approaches such as narrative methodology in which researchers tell the informant’s story. In the field of anthropology, ethnographic approaches and narratives in the form of life history have been used. In the field of textual analysis in social science, hermeneutics and conversational and discourse analysis have been implemented. In ethnography, the object of investigation is the events and not the stories created. However, narrative methodology differs from ethnography and textual analysis in that it is interpretive and has to do with “how protagonists interpret things” (Bruner, 1990, p. 51). Narratologists draw on the traditions for qualitative analysis, ethnography, textual analysis and other methodological approaches, but is distinguished by the interpretive principal. There is no one method in narrative analysis because it has to do with “how protagonists interpret things” (Bruner, 1990, p. 51) and how they systematically interpret their interpretations. Not all narratives, nor all lives, take the

same form; there are a variety of narrative genres. Riessman (1991) explains that some of the narrative genres include “habitual narratives (when events happen over and over and consequently there is no peak in the action), hypothetical narratives (which depict events that did not happen), and topic-centered narratives (snapshots of past events that are linked thematically)” (p.18). Each narrative has an ideational function (the content as well as the meaning of what someone says), textual function (how something is said), interpersonal function (the shifting roles of speaker and listener), and larger social context (in which the text cannot be autonomous of) (Halliday, 1973).

Narrative methodology is well suited to study subjective and identity largely because of the importance given to imagination and human involvement in constructing a story. Narrative inquiry provides “insight” into the person, help researchers understand the inner or subjective world of a person, how he or she thinks about his or her own experience, situation, problems, life, and effectively portrays the social and historical world that the person is living in, and illuminates the meanings of events, experiences, and conditions (Runyan, 1984). I was able to understand their individual identities and systems of meaning, as well as their culture and social world through the narratives of biracial Korean Americans and their life stories.

### **Research Strategy: Settings, Participants, and Other Sampling Decisions**

My study was conducted in Seattle, Washington, a racially and ethnically diverse city in the Northwest (Nyden, Maly, & Lukehart, 1997; Rushbrook, 2002). In Seattle, the second largest race/ethnic group are Asian and Pacific Islanders (13.6%), followed by the Black or African Americans (8.4%), Hispanic/Latino ethnicity (5.3%), Two or More Races (4.5%), American Indian & Alaska Native (1.0%), and others (2.5%) (U.S. Census, 2000). The state of Washington ranked sixth in the top ten states regarding the percentage distribution of the two or more races

population by state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In the Greater Seattle area, there is a higher concentration of mixed race people—4 percent of the area’s population—than any other large metropolitan area in the country (Turnbull, 2008; Mavin Foundation, 2014).

In 2011, Korean Americans consisted of 9.5% of the total Asian American population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to the East-West Center (2010), the state of Washington ranks third on the top ten states with a Korean American population per 100,000 residents (East-West Center, 2010). This setting is important because there is a large diversity within the Korean immigrant population with 1st-generation, 1.5-generation, and American-born 2nd-generation Korean Americans: those who retain more of the Korean culture, those who are bridging both the Korean and American culture, and those who are more acculturated to the American culture. The presence of a large mixed heritage population provides a setting in which race and racial identity options vary and discussions of multiracial identities are prevalent.

I chose my participants from the University of Washington, a higher education institution that has an ethnic/racially diverse student population. The institution had an enrollment of 13% Asian Americans in 2010 (University of Washington, 2011). The University of Washington has First to Fourth Year Korean language classes held every semester. The First Year and Second Year Korean language classes are divided into heritage and non-heritage classes, and there are approximately 200 students who are enrolled each quarter.

I used purposive sampling to maximize the possibility of identifying subject participants who would be able to answer my research questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (1998) states that purposive sampling uses criterion-based selection for choosing participants for the purpose of the study. Participants meeting the following criteria were selected: (1) first

generation biracial, (2) parents with two different racial/ethnic heritages (one of the parents was born and/or grew up in Korea and the other parent was born and grew up in the United States, (3) second generation American citizen, and (4) taken or is taking Korean language classes at the university (higher education setting).

As seen in Table 1, the participants in my study had parents of a variety of racial backgrounds. According to the 2000 census, the majority of biracial Asians are of one Asian and one White parent (52.4%), followed by other combinations (17.7%), Asian and some other race (15%), Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (8.4%), and Asian and Black/African American (6.4%) (U.S. Census, 2012). Despite the fact that the majority of biracial Korean Americans may be of one Korean parent and one White parent, I did not limit the study to exploring only those who are of Korean and White parents. Also, Table 2 shows the different world languages that each participant had the choice to learn in high school, the world language chosen, Korean heritable language experiences before attending university, Korean courses taken at the university, and other languages spoken.

The experiences and identity development among the biracial Korean Americans shared similarities but were all unique. Although all the participants were students at the University of Washington, and all had taken or were taking Korean language classes on campus, their experiences differed vastly depending on the racial background of the non-White parent, the various locations of residence, dynamics of community, gender, sexual orientation, previous exposure to Korean culture, friendship groups, community involvement, phenotype, family environment, and cultural awareness, and the like. Therefore, I considered the various factors that influenced each individual's identity empowerment journey and acknowledged the rich life experiences they had as they engaged with their identities.

Table 1

*Demographic Description of Participants*

Name	Age	Gender	Year at the University	Parents				
				Korean Parent		Non-Korean Parent		
					<u>Age Immigrated**</u>		<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Age Immigrated***</u>
Robert*	21	Male	3rd Year	Mother	1st grade	Father	Black	N/A
Emma*	21	Female	4th Year	Mother	Early twenties	Father	White	N/A
Amy*	23	Female	4th Year	Mother	Late twenties	Father	White (Irish)	Late Twenties
Betty*	20	Female	3rd Year	Mother	Twenties	Father	White (French)	N/A
Josh*	21	Male	4th Year	Mother	17	Father	Chinese	17~18
Noah*	20	Male	3rd Year	Mother	Twenties	Father	White	N/A
Caden*	29	Male	4th Year	Mother	20	Father	Japanese	N/A
Zoe*	21	Female	4th Year	Father	5	Mother	Japanese	Late Twenties
Hunter*	21	Male	3rd Year	Mother	Late teens	Father	Hong Kongese	Teens
Lily*	22	Female	4th Year	Father	26	Mother	White	N/A
Mason*	22	Male	4th Year	Mother	Forties	Father	Japanese	N/A

*Note.* \*All names are pseudonyms selected by the researcher. \*\*refers to age immigrated to the U.S. \*\*\*refers to age immigrated to the U.S., if the non-Korean parent is an immigrant.

Table 2

*Language Learning Experiences of Participants*

Name	World Languages** Offered in High School	World Language Learned in High School	Korean HL School Before Attending the University		Korean Courses Taken at the University	Other Languages***
			Age Started	Yrs Attended		
Robert*	French, German, Italian, Spanish	Spanish	N/A	N/A	1st, 2nd Year	None
Emma*	French, Japanese, Spanish	Japanese	8~9	1~years	1st, 2nd Year	Japanese
Amy*	French, Mandarin, Spanish	French	9	7 years	4th Year	Mandarin
Betty*	French, German, Spanish	French	5	1~2 years	1st, 2nd Year	French
Josh*	French, Mandarin, Spanish	Mandarin	N/A	N/A	1st, 2nd Year	Mandarin
Noah*	French, German, Spanish	Spanish	8	5~6 years	1st Year	None
Caden*	Mandarin, Japanese, Spanish	Japanese	N/A	N/A	1st Year	Japanese
Zoe*	French, Japanese, Spanish	Japanese	N/A	N/A	1st Year	Japanese
Hunter*	French, German, Japanese, Latin, Spanish	Japanese	N/A	N/A	1st Year	Chinese dialect
Lily*	French, Italian, Mandarin, Spanish	Spanish	7~8	2 years	2nd, 4th Year	N/A
Mason*	Spanish, Japanese, Mandarin, French	Spanish	N/A	N/A	1st Year	Japanese

*Note.* \*All names are pseudonyms selected by the researcher. \*\*as opposed to *foreign* languages because some languages may not be “foreign” to some students. \*\*\*languages the participant currently uses other than English and Korean.

## **Data Sources and Data Collection**

This research used the narrative methodology to guide data collection and analysis. Narrative inquiry posits that people communicate about their lives through the stories they share (Mishler, 1986; Bailey & Tilley, 2002; Webster & Mertova, 2007). There are four main components to this study: (a) five interviews and written responses of participants from the pilot study exploring biracial Korean American identity; (b) individual interviews with six new participants; (c) written responses by new participants; and (d) participant observation of two participants.

Reissman (2008) states that “personal narrative encompasses long sections of talk – extended accounts of lives in context” (p. 6). To elicit such responses, a semi-structured interview guides was created with seven open-ended questions used to prompt participants to recall and discuss their experiences. Riessman (1993) advocates the development of an interview guide with five to seven broad questions relating to the research topic, supplemented by probe questions in case the participant has difficulty getting started. Examples include, ‘Can you tell me a little more?’ or ‘Can you give me a specific example?’. Meanwhile, Bell’s (1988) approach to narrative studies was to ask open-ended questions, “listen with a minimum of interpretations, and tie...questions and comments to DES (diethylstilbestrol) daughters’ responses by repeating their words...whenever possible” (p.100). Semi-structured interviews prompt participants to describe experiences in narrative form rather than simply responding to directed questions. Semi-structured interview methods with open-ended questions were used in this study, with the interview formats suggested by Riessman (1993) and Bell (1988).

I collected interviews with new participants during October 2015 to February 2016. I conducted 30 to 90 minute semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002) with six participants. Each

semi-structured interview began with an invitation to describe life in the university, progressing to questions about heritage language courses and identity (see Appendix B). Interviewing for narrative represents a change in practice from traditional interviewing techniques (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008). According to Webster and Mertova (2007), narrative interview guides are structured to elicit reflection while avoiding leading questions and prompts that increase research reactivity. For this reason, I allowed participants to describe their own stories of identity, while actively listening and using non-verbal prompts to encourage participants to provide additional descriptions of their experiences. With the consent of all participants, all formal interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. I kept notes about the setting, the participants' body language, changes in emotion, and surroundings. Because the purpose of the study was to learn and understand how biracial Korean Americans make meaning of their lives, the primary source of data collected were through the words of the individuals themselves through interviews.

Along with the new interviews I conducted, the five interviews and written responses of the pilot study that were collected during January 2015 through March 2015 were also be part of the data that was analyzed. There were five biracial Korean American university students in the pilot study - three were biracial Korean Americans with one Korean parent and one White parent; one biracial Korean American who had one Korean parent and one Chinese parent; and one biracial Korean American with one Korean parent and one Black parent.

According to Rubin (1995), written language serves as a vehicle for expressing and constructing many facets of social identity, as does speech. Written responses gave students an opportunity to reflect deeply, about how they made meaning of their identity. I asked students to describe two salient experiences – one before attending university and one since attending university – related to being biracial a Korean American and to write about what those events

mean to them. The participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and had the choice to withdraw at any time. All participants were asked to grant permission to the researcher to use a audio recorder during the interview.

I incorporated participant observation. Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (p. 79). Observations enable researchers to describe existing situations by providing a “written photograph” of the situation under study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) state that “the goal for design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitation of the method” (p.92).

Participant observation enabled to help me to acquire an understanding of how biracial Korean Americans interrelate as well as how their different identities surface in various situations, giving me access to “backstage culture” (deMunck & Sobo, 1998, p. 43). It also gave me an understanding of what is happening in the participants’ lives and enabled me to compare data derived from narratives with data obtained from observations which, is a process is called triangulation. During October to December 2015, I observed two biracial Korean American participants, one half-White half-Korean female participant, and one half-Chinese half-Korean male participant, across different spaces including the Korean heritage language classes, other university courses, and various meetings with friendship groups.

### **Approach to Analyzing the Data**

The texts of narrative analyses are analyzed within their social, cultural, and historical context from many different perspectives (Hunter, 2009). The narratives are deconstructed to reveal “powerful discourses, hierarchies, presuppositions, deliberate omissions and polar

opposites” (Grbich, 1999, p. 52). Hence narrative analysis requires an in-depth engagement of the analyst with the understanding of the research participants’ experience. While several typologies and models of narrative analysis exist (Cortazzi, 2001; Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 2005), in order to explore both the content and process of participants’ stories, I chose to thematic as described by Riessman (2008) to analyzing the narrative data.

The thematic approach examines the content of the narratives, and is useful for theorizing across a number of cases to find common thematic elements across participants and the events they report. Riessman (2008) highlighted how thematic analysis can be used with a variety of data and help researchers working with a number of cases identify common themes. I used a thematic narrative analysis approach to analyzing my data. The analysis involved reading the transcripts several times, inductive coding, developing themes and subthemes, and seeking to identify core narrative elements associated with each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach “focuses on the content of narratives as manifested in separate parts of the story, irrespective of the context of the complete story” (Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R., & Zilber, T., 1998, p.16). Also, the thematic narrative perspective is the classical method for conducting research with narratives and life stories in psychology, sociology, and education (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994; Riessman, 1993).

The four steps of thematic coding (or content analysis) are summarized by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998). These steps are: (1) selection of subtext; (2) definition of content categories; (3) sorting the material into the categories; and (4) drawing conclusions from the results. In the first step, all the relevant sections of the interview transcripts were marked and assembled to form a new file or subtext. The selected sections of the subtexts were withdrawn from the total context of the life story and were treated independently. In the second step, I

developed categories or various themes and perspectives cut across the selected subtext. I read the subtext as openly as possible and defined the major content categories that emerged from the reading. McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, and Day (1996) use Categorical-Content perspective that deals with a large number of broad categories. For example, Mc Adams et al. (1996) present two “big bucket” dimensions of identity: communion and agency. Based on existing literature and theoretical work, they define four content categories for each broad dimension. There were four content categories for communion – love/friendship, dialogue, care/help, and community, and four content categories for agency – self-mastery, status, achievement/responsibility, and empowerment. In the third step of analysis, I separated sentences or utterances of several of my participants into assigned related categories. In the final step, the sentences in each category were counted, tabulated, and ordered by frequency.

Narrative inquirers recognize that there are limits of validity within a quantitative paradigm, and assert the acceptance of relational and interactive nature of human science research. Furthermore, narrative inquirers recognize that the nature of knowledge is tentative and variable (Clandinin, 2007). To increase the rigor of this study, I used three strategies to address reactivity and bias: triangulation, reflexivity, and member checking. According to Patton (1999), triangulation involves using multiple data sources in an investigation to produce understanding. I examined the consistency of the findings generated by data from the pilot study, new interview transcripts, written responses, my notes, participant observation field notes, and also the feedback and or additional comments that the interviewees sent me after the interviews.

Reflexivity consists of the researcher being aware of her effect on the process and outcomes of research based on the premise that “knowledge cannot be separated from the knower” (Steedman, 1991, p. 53) and that, “In the social sciences, there is only interpretation.

Nothing speaks for itself” (Denzin, 1994, p. 500). According to Horsburgh (2003), reflexivity involves a thoughtful consideration of the ways one’s sociopolitical position can affect the ability to come to an accurate representation of the data. I incorporated Johnson and Waterfield (2004)’s method of engaging in reflexive journaling.

Member checks are primarily used in qualitative inquiry methodology and are defined as a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While member checking occurs during the interview itself as researchers restate or summarize information to determine accuracy, it also occurs near the end of the project. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend reporting to the participants the analyzed data to review for authenticity. Participants check to see whether a “true” or authentic representation was made of what she conveyed during the interview. Member checks may involve sharing all of the findings with the participants, and allowing them to critically analyze the findings and comment on them (Creswell, 2007). After transcribing the interviews and generating emerging themes and categorizing the data, I checked with the participants to confirm that the data were accurate and the themes emerge meaningfully.

In addition to these three strategies, I incorporated a process of evaluating my research utilizing the four criteria for evaluation of narrative studies suggested by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber's (1998):

1. Width: The Comprehensiveness of Evidence. This dimension refers to the quality of the interview or the observations as well as to the proposed interpretation or analysis.

Numerous quotations in reporting narrative studies, as well as suggestions of alternative

explanations, should be provided for the reader's judgment of the evidence and its interpretation.

2. Coherence: The Way Different Parts of the Interpretation Create a Complete and Meaningful Picture. Coherence can be evaluated both internally, in terms of how the parts fit together, and externally, namely, against existing theories and previous research.

3. Insightfulness: The Sense of Innovation or Originality in the Presentation of the Story and Its Analysis. Close to this criterion is the question of whether reading the analysis of the life story of an "other" has resulted in greater comprehension and insight regarding the reader's own life.

4. Parsimony: The Ability to Provide an Analysis Based on a Small Number of Concepts, and Elegance or Aesthetic Appeal (which relate to the literary merits of written or oral presentations of the story and its analysis).

Narrative researchers further argue that compared with quantitative measures of reliability validity, objective and replicability, criteria for evaluating narrative studies are qualitative in nature and consist of judgments that cannot be expressed in scales or numbers (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998). In addition, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) wrote, "The processes of analysis, evaluation, and interpretation are neither terminal nor mechanical. They are always emergent, unpredictable, and unfinished" (p. 479).

### **Design Limitations and Related Issues Concerning Data**

There are various strengths to this design. First, a distinct advantage of narrative inquiry through individual interviews is that it is possible to gain in-depth understanding about a person's life and experiences. Interview methods help the researcher obtain understanding through detailed examples and rich narratives, and unravel complicated events and events that

evolve over time (Morgan, 1998). One of the purposes of this study was to enable biracial Korean American to reflect about their lives and ascertain meanings from their experiences. Another strength of conducting individual interview is that it is a form of synchronous communication of time and place, making it possible for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions, or clarification questions that may later be an important source of data. Because Korean culture consists of extensive nonverbal communication, I may have had opportunities to probe with verbal and nonverbal prompts for more complete and better explained answers. The personal interactions with the participants may have allowed rapport to develop between researcher and interviewee, and the participants may have become relaxed and candid. I used observation as another evaluation method. Recording what the researcher physically observes during their observation provides additional information for the study (Merriam, 2009). Finally, the follow-up and written responses of the participants helped shed light on the details of a particular response. The follow-up report provided the participants the opportunity to further illustrate or expand what they said in the earlier interview.

There are also limitations to this design. Because of the one-to-one, face-to-face nature of the interviews, some participants may not have felt comfortable disclosing their personal identity experiences or life stories. Because the number of biracial Korean Americans was limited, most of the participants were recruited through personal contacts. This may have affected what the participants decided to disclose to the interviewer.

In addition to the design, there may be limitations that were accompanied by the method of analysis. The Categorical-Content perspective was considered in this study because it was in concordance with the research goals. Interpretive content analysis requires a profound and sophisticated process of selecting subcategories, defining them within an interpretive framework,

and using them in understanding the interviewees' presentations of themselves (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). However, the categorical-content approach focuses on the "categorical" rather than the "holistic" and extracts parts of the list story out of the whole and may disregard contextual factors. The Categorical-Content perspective also pays attention to the content and not to the form, which is an important source of information. At the same time, narrative researchers suggest readers to liberate from the adherence to the dichotomies of "whole" and "category" methods of analysis because in reality it is not a dichotomy; rather, it exemplifies "intersubjectivity" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 169). To this end, it was essential that I recognize the shortcomings of interpretive content analysis and take into consideration additional information such as the length and detail of the interviews, intensity, emotions, as well as follow-up interviews, and written responses in order for the life stories to convey their richness and depth (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, 1998).

My positionality was both an advantage and a limitation to my study. Positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to the other and is relative to the cultural values and norms of both the researcher and participant (Merriam et al., 2009). Banks (1998) describes four types of researchers. The first is the true *indigenous-insider* researcher who holds the values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of their indigenous/cultural community in the study. The *indigenous-outsider* researcher is one who has assimilated into outsider culture and is perceived as an outsider by the indigenous people of her community. The third type is the *external-insider*, the researcher who has become socialized, or "adopted" into the outsider culture, rejecting the cultural values of her indigenous community. The last type of researcher is the *external-outsider*, who is socialized into a community different from the one under study, and

has only a partial understanding and appreciation for its cultural values which he/she is interested in learning more about (Banks, 1998).

My personal identity journey has helped me understand the in-betweenness and complexities of identities. I spent the first half of my life in the U.S. and the second half in Korea, two extremely different settings that heightened my awareness to race, ethnicity, gender, class, and identity options. I am a native speaker of both languages, and am fluent in both cultural norms, enabling me to see racialized aspects of both cultures. My positionality as a 1.5-generation Korean American and a former Korean heritage language instructor on campus has given me an advantage not only in building trust and rapport, but also in understanding the verbal and nonverbal cues of the participants. In this sense, I am an indigenous-insider and an indigenous-outsider to the biracial Korean American community. However, while having dealt with being in-between two cultures, I have not dealt with the experiences of being in-between two different racial and ethnic categories as I am a monoracial Korean, with two “pure blood” Korean parents. The exposure I had to the Korean community and culture and my ability to code-switch may have limited the way in which I view and understand the diversity of identity options that my participants have had or have chosen.

### **Chapter 3: Understanding the Role of Family, Friends, and the Community**

This chapter is divided up into two sections. The first section describes the demographic data of the eleven participants. The second section presents the findings related to the major themes that emerged from the data including the role of family, friends, and the community.

#### **Demographic Data**

Eleven biracial individuals, six male individuals and five female individuals, participated in this study. The participants ranged in age from 20-29 years, with a mean age of 21.91 (SD=2.39). At the time of collecting data (January, 2015 through February, 2016), all eleven participants were undergraduates. All participants were first generation being mixed race, second generation being American, and they had parents with two different racial/ethnic heritages. All of the participants identified as being of two races, but the terms they used to identify themselves varied, including biracial, multiracial, half-Black half-Korean, half-White half-Korean, half-Asian half-Korean, *hapa* (a term originated from Hawaii which is used to describe people of mixed heritage), and both Korean and White. Although one of the requirements of sampling was to have a Korean immigrant parent, nine participants of the study had a Korean *mother*. Two of the participants had a Korean immigrant father which meets the Korean immigrant parent criteria.

Participants reported living in neighborhoods that were racially diverse with a significant Korean American population. Seven participants spent the majority of their lives in the Seattle area: four participants were born and raised in the Seattle area, and three moved to Seattle when they were very young (age five and under) after living in other states in the United States, including Hawaii, Colorado, and California. One participant was born and raised in Hawaii and moved to Seattle for the university at the age of 18. Two participants lived abroad before moving

to the Seattle area: one participant immigrated to Seattle from Japan at the age of eight with her family, and another at the age of 11 years old with his mother prior to living in Japan.

### **Seven Dominant Themes**

The main purpose of this study was to examine the identity development of biracial Korean American university students and how different factors, including Korean heritage language, may have influenced this process. Although the students had different experiences, they all reported that their identities have significantly transformed compared to high school, and that family and the Korean language were very important in constructing and reconstructing their identities. As seen in Table 3, seven themes were identified from the data analysis, with respect to biracial Korean American identity development and navigation that are presented in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. In Chapter 3, there are three themes that highlight the role of family, friends, and the community: (1) Family matters; (2) Whose crew are you?; (3) Discovering and belonging in the Korean community. In Chapter 4, there are four themes that show the importance of looks, language, and the university, and how the participants' identities were fluid : (4) Look the part to feel the part; (5) Korean language is a “door to a whole ‘nother world”; (6) The university as an important time and space for identity exploration; and (7) Identities are fluid and context-dependent.

The first three themes are the major relationships that seem to influence the biracial Korean Americans' construction and engagement of identities of the participants in my sample. Theme One describes how one's parents (the Korean parent and non-Korean parent), siblings, and extended family are an important element to biracial Korean American identity. Theme Two illustrates how peer groups – Korean, non-Korean, and mixed – influence how biracial Korean Americans construct and engage with their identities. Theme Three describes how the Korean

church and Korean community interact with biracial Korean Americans and influence their identities.

Table 3

*Seven Dominant Themes*

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Themes</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Content</u>
Chapter 3	Theme 1	Family Matters	Role of parents (Korean parent and non-Korean parent), siblings, and extended family
	Theme 2	Whose Crew are You?	Peer group influence
	Theme 3	Discovering and Belonging in the Korean Community	Interaction of Korean church and Korean community
Chapter 4	Theme 4	Looking the Part to Feel the Part	Aspects of physical appearance, skin tone, phenotype
	Theme 5	Korean Heritage Language is a “Door to a Whole ‘nother World”	Significance of Korean heritage language
	Theme 6	The University as an Important Time and Space for Identity Exploration	Experiences prior to attending the university and at the university
	Theme 7	Identities are Fluid and Context-dependent	The fluidity and complexity of biracial Korean American identities

Theme Four is consistent with biracial identity development and colorism theories, and addresses the aspects of physical appearance, phenotype, skin tone, and visible traits that play a role in identity and identification of biracial Korean Americans. Theme Five is consistent with theories about ethnic identity and heritage language learning, as it specifically sheds light on how the Korean language plays a role in biracial Korean Americans navigating their identities across cultural borders. Theme Five encompasses what the Korean heritage language means for the biracial Korean participants; the different motivations for learning Korean such as communication with family and acceptance from the Korean society; advantages and disadvantages of Korean heritage language schools (primary education/K-12 level); and Korean heritage classes at the university (higher education).

The last two themes explore the fluidity of biracial Korean-American's identity over time and in relation to the larger context of the university. Theme Six, consistent with the notion that identities are fluid and change over time, illustrates how biracial Korean American university students' identities were different prior to university and how they were at the university. Finally, Theme Seven – which aligns with Social Identity Theory, the concept of situational identity, and the ecological approach to biracial identity development – describes how context is significant in biracial Korean Americans' construction and navigation of identities. Theme Seven describes how the context of the university (higher education setting) is important in comparison with pre-university, and also describes online spaces as a context that may challenge, disrupt, and change notions of race and identity.

### **Theme 1: Family Matters**

The findings describe how the participants' families – including parents (Korean parent and non-Korean parent), extended family, and family environment – had a significant influence the identity development of the participants. All of the participants reported that their families, especially their parents, were a significant influence in their identity development. Eight reported that they had positive and strong relationships with their parents; two reported that they had a positive relationship with one of their parents, and one participant reported that he rarely kept in touch with his parents. Excerpts in this section specifically reveal that the Korean mothers of participants were supportive of their children exploring their Korean heritage.

**Korean parent.** As noted earlier, nine participants of this study had a Korean mother and non-Korean father, and two participants had a Korean father and non-Korean mother.

**Korean mother.** In all nine cases of participants with Korean mothers, students stated that their mother was the most important person that provided a foundation to their Korean identity,

enabled them to further explore their Korean heritage, and learn the Korean language. Emma, who is half-White half-Korean stated, “I think because my mom was always in my life, I identify more as Korean, and my dad appeared in my life more later.” She adds, “...cus my mom was Korean, I would identify more as [Korean].” Amy, whose mother is Korean and father Irish American, shared, “...with the mother’s influence, my mom is the most important to me just because our bond is really tight. And so I love Korean culture because I love my mom.”

Robert, who is half-Black half-Korean, felt he identified more as Korean than Black because he grew up predominantly with his mother and maternal grandparents. He explained how the time he spent with his mother and her family influenced how Korean he felt, as well as the interests and hobbies he has:

I feel like the most important thing in determining how someone feels is how much time they spend with their parents...I’m sure my attitude would be a lot more different if I spent more time with my mom *and* my dad...when I was really little, I lived with my mom’s family, the first time I even started playing video games, it was one years old with my uncle. But if I was with my dad instead, I would be playing basketball or some kind of sports, I would be different than I am today.

Robert pointed out that since his Korean mother hadn’t worked outside of the home for ten years, she had “a lot more free time” and he spent a lot of his time with his mother. He talked about not being able to spend as much time with his father because “he’s working most of the time.”

The Korean mothers also provided motivation for the participants to speak and learn the Korean language. Due to the fact that all the mothers of the participants were first generation immigrants, their first language was Korean. All of the participants explained that before they learned Korean in the university, they would primarily speak in English with their mothers, while

their mothers spoke Korean and English to them. Betty, who is half-Korean half-French American explained, “I’m taking Korean because my mom is Korean and I’ve always wanted to speak Korean with her.” Betty learned how to read and write Korean at the Korean heritage language school, but was not able to fully understand and communicate in Korean. She said, “...when I started getting older, I wanted to be able to speak Korean with my mom and also I started watching more [Korean] dramas, so I wanted to understand.” Josh, whose mother is Korean and father is Chinese, talked about how he decided to learn Korean in the university to communicate with his mother in Korean:

So after I’ve taken First Year Korean, I’ve had a foundation with which I can use to speak with my mom in Korean...I think I can definitely communicate with her, but had I not taken First Year [Korean classes], it would have been a little more difficult...in my immediate family, I really only speak Korean with her.

All participants with Korean mothers shared that they were exposed to the Korean language because they were young and picked up on some Korean words and phrases that their mothers had used. Most of the participants who hadn’t learned the Korean language outside of the home explained that they understood what their mothers were saying in Korean even though they could not speak Korean back to them. Amy, who comes from a family of six children, explained her mother’s efforts and support in making sure her children acquire the Korean language at the home:

But with my mom, generally, it’s [communication with her children is] in Korean. And I know it can be unnatural for some families, but she always speaks Korean to her kids. And English sometimes when we’re all together and my dad’s there. But still, she would

speaking in Korean. And if my dad wants to know, then one of the kids would translate and tell him. And so this Korean language has always been in our family.

For the participants who learned how to read and write Korean at the Korean heritage language schools, they expressed that the reading and writing aspects of their Korean language learning was weak because their primary use of the Korean language was listening and speaking with their mothers.

*Typical Korean mother: "She raised me in a Korean way."* Several participants explained that their mothers were "very Korean" in the ways they raised them, how their mothers were strict about their education and achievement, and how they always spoke Korean and cooked Korean food for the family. Noah recognized that his mother and father were different in their parenting styles. He explains that his mother had a "Korean style" whereas his White American father – who was originally from Massachusetts – had a relatively more "chill and relax", "American" style when dealing with things:

To put it nicely (laughs), she's relatively strict on certain things. She definitely wanted to keep things really neat and organized. And that doesn't mean that my dad's messy or anything. Cus I think Americans are more like, 'As long as it's relatively okay, you don't have to worry about it.' But she [my mother]'s like, 'Make sure everything is neat and organized, clean and spotless and everything.'...My dad said one thing like, 'As long as you can find stuff, you're fine' and my mom was like, 'Don't do that. Everything has to be spotless.'

Similar to Noah, several other participants noticed that their Korean mothers were very organized and "kept the house very clean" as well. Betty tried to explain how her mother was

different from her friends' mothers who were not Korean, and how her house were different compared to houses of other White American families:

Cus like, when I'm at home, my mom is in charge of the family. Like she orders everyone around, and so. And our house is like, predominantly Korean style. We take our shoes off at our house, and my dad does. And my house is very clean because my mom's a neat freak. And we have like, a lot of Korean decorations hanging around. So when I'm at home, I feel like I'm in a Korean house, and outside I'm in like America.

Two other participants echoed this view, saying that their Korean mother "takes charge in the house" and plays a major role in decision making in the family. They also shared how their houses were "Korean style" in that like other Korean houses, they would have to take off their shoes before entering the house.

Some participants recalled how important their education and academic achievement were important to their mothers. They explained that their mothers were "looking out for them" and "wishing for the best" but at times they felt like they were "too strict." Mason described his mother as a "one of those education-minded people" and said that although he grew up in Japan until elementary school, his mother flew with him to the United States because she valued his education. Mason shared that since elementary school his mother told him that he'd be going to America "because America offers a lot of opportunities." Mason kept chuckling while talking about his mother and said that the passion she had for his education is part of "the gift of having a Korean mom." Noah remembered that his mother was very strict with his grades and made comments that he felt were "Korean style":

Cus I remember in middle school, there was like an English class or history, and I would get like 100% on certain things but my mom would say things like, 'That's good, but you

need to get over 100%. You need to be best in the class.’...Like even if I got 100%, she [my mom] would be like, ‘Make sure you get more.’ ‘You need to be number 1.’

Noah continued to explain why he thought that his mother had this kind of approach because of the larger Korean culture:

Cus you know, Koreans have a ranking system. But in America, those don’t exist. It doesn’t matter. Whatever grade you get is the grade you get. It doesn’t matter what you are to everything else. So I think maybe the disconnect kind of came from there.

Participants with “typical” Korean mothers also seemed to have grown up eating more Korean food because their mothers would cook Korean food for the family often. Caden emphasized the importance of his Korean mother and grandmother to his identity. He explained that his mother and grandmother would always cook Korean food, and he expresses his Korean side today through Korean food:

Yeah I think that’s [food’s] the thing that I was the most involved in in my Korean culture...It is the food I had at home from my mother and grandmother that left the biggest impression...My grandmother and my mom, they cook. I always thought they were really good cooks. And other people did too. And I got to try all good things that I couldn’t find at restaurants here. But it seems like that’s all they did. They would wake up and cook breakfast and when we were done, they were preparing the next meal.

Josh, whose mother is Korean and father is Chinese, had a similar experience with Caden in that his mother preferred to cook and eat Korean food most of the time, and that was an expression of the Korean culture. He shared that his mother “likes eating rice and kimchi everyday” and although she loves trying Chinese foods from his father’s side, some foods are a little bit of a “shock to her.”

*Atypical Korean mother: “She’s not a typical Korean mom.”* Three participants who had Korean mothers explained that their mothers were not the “typical Korean mom” because they were “more relaxed” in their relationships with their children and did not abide by traditional Korean mannerisms. Hunter talked about how a normal day after school with his mother and himself would be different than other Korean households:

I would speak to my parents differently than other Korean kids would. Like I don’t speak to my parents like really proper like ‘*Umma*~ [mom in Korean] like that. I’d just be like, ‘Yo mom, what’s up? How you doing?’ So it’s a little more casual. Cus like, you know, I go to a lot of Korean houses, and I would have to take my shoes off. Well, I still take off my shoes at my house. But you know, sometimes, it’s not that big of a deal.

Hunter shared that the city his family grew up was “a little more ghetto” and because there weren’t as many Korean families living around the neighborhood, he and his family would be more influenced by the non-Korean families near them. Hunter further explains that his family is “unconventional” in that they do things “a little bit more, American.” He explained that his mother would never mention Korean holidays and his family wouldn’t celebrate or participate in Korean events. He quickly equated his family as being “more American” to being “a little more, less cultured.”

The participants who had atypical or “unconventional” Korean mothers said that their mothers were lenient about the decisions that the participants made and gave them more freedom. Emma described how her mother and father met when her father was working at the army base in Korea and her mother was working at a waitress at a nearby restaurant. Emma shared that her parents got married were not a “typical” Korean way and that her mother was different in how she parented her. Emma explained that her mother was a “rebel” when she was young and that

her mother's personality and experiences may have influenced how her mother brought her up. She shared, "My mom's not typically Korean in the sense that she's not strict about me; she doesn't want you to become one way or another."

*Korean Mothers: A Bridge Between Generations.* In addition to providing support for participants in their identity exploration and being a motivation to learn Korean, Korean mothers were also "mediators" between their own parents and their children. Josh explained that both his parents were bilingual in their native language and in English, and were "mediators" between him "as an English learner" and his maternal and paternal grandparents, who only spoke Korean. In Josh's case, his father would be the link between his Chinese grandparents and him and his brother, while his mother would be the bridge between his Korean grandparents and him and his brother. Robert explained that his mother immigrated from Korea with his uncle and grandparents. Because Robert's uncle moved to the US at a younger age than his mother, he acquired English as his first language and couldn't speak Korean very well. Robert shared how his mother "...does everything for her parents. She's the one that translates everything, goes to their doctors' appointments with them, goes shopping with them and all these things." Robert said that his mother was also a bridge between him and his grandparents. He explained how his mother would be the main channel of communication between him and his maternal grandparents, translating and interpreting between the two generations.

**Korean fathers.** The two participants who had Korean fathers both shared that their fathers did not play a big role in their Korean identity construction while growing up. Both Zoe and Lily's fathers were Korean immigrants to the United States, and both came during their 20s for educational purposes. Prior to immigrating to the United States, Zoe's father had spent a lot of time in Japan, while Lily's father spent a lot of time in Korea. Although both Zoe and Lily's

fathers were “Korean in blood” and could speak Korean, they did not put much effort into cultivating the Korean side of their children’s identity. In the case of Zoe, her parents communicated in Japanese because her mother was Japanese and her father was “conversational in Japanese.” Zoe’s father immigrated to the United States around five years old and did not have opportunities to learn Korean other than at the home. Much like Zoe, Zoe’s father had taken Korean classes when he was getting his bachelor’s degree in the US, but he never followed up with it, especially after he married Zoe’s mother.

Lily, whose mother is White and father Korean, said that her parents communicated mostly in English. Both participants mentioned that their fathers did not emphasize the importance of learning Korean or exploring their Korean identities. In fact, Lily shared that his father did not encourage her learning Korean before he graduated from high school:

My dad, he came to the U.S. as a student, and then met my mom and got married. But he always thought that if I had an accent, it wouldn’t be good. So he didn’t want me to learn Korean at a young age because he thought that having an accent – having a Korean accent speaking English – wasn’t a good thing. Because he had had some bad experiences with that...he let my mom take us to Korean school but he didn’t help with it [Korean] that much until I got older. After I went back to Korea after I graduated high school, then he was really helpful. And he, ever since I’ve been at university, I’ve been able to email my papers to him and he would correct them and send them back.

Lily further explained that after she entered the university, her father was supportive of her learning the Korean language and connecting with her Korean heritage.

**Non-Korean parent.** In addition to the influence of their Korean mothers in identity construction and navigation, the non-Korean parent of these students played an important role in

shaping their identity. Most of the participants with non-Korean fathers reported that their parents mainly communicated in English, but their fathers knew how to speak Korean, even though they were short phrases and sentences they learned from their spouse. For example, Emma explains that her White father “took time to learn Korean” and “would still try to say Korean words” despite having a thick accent. She added, “One of the main reasons why I decided to take Korean was because I couldn’t have it that my dad knew more Korean than me.” When Amy’s parents first met, her father could not speak Korean and her mother did not speak English very well. Amy talked about how her parents “had to literally pull out dictionaries and communicate with each other”, but after her father went to Korean language school, “he learned how to read and write in Korean” and would still speak Korean when he could even though he can’t speak Korean fluently. Both Emma and Amy shared that their father’s willingness to learn about their mother’s Korean culture and language was a positive influence to them. They also commented on how the openness of their father helped them to accept the non-Korean side of their identity as well.

Echoing the experience of the participants with non-Korean fathers, Lily - who has a Korean father and White mother - shared her experience of having a mother who was supportive of attaining an understanding both sides of her parents’ culture and assisting her to explore both identities:

My mom’s American, White, and my dad’s Korean and my mom was always really interested in me learning Korean. Like she, she thought it would be very beneficial if me and my brother were bilingual...my mom was like, ‘My kids are Korean American, and I want them to have a Korean American identity.’ So my mom took me to the Korean

American church by herself and became friends with Korean Americans in that community.

Lily added that although her mother didn't speak Korean, she was "quite adventurous" and liked to "explore different cultures." She also shared that one of the main reasons that she embraced both cultures was because her mother "put a lot of effort in connecting with the [Korean] family" and "in being respectful and learning about the cultural differences."

Participants overall relationship with their non-Korean parent also influenced how they constructed and reconstructed their identities. Emma spent a lot of time with her mother since her father was in the U.S. Army. She said that up until high school, her father had been stationed in different cities and often worked in different countries while her mother and she were in the U.S. This affected how Emma identified herself, as she self-identified as Korean, even though her father was White. Emma shared that when her father was back in the U.S. to live with her and her mother, she spent more time with her father, which is when she started acknowledging her "other side." She explains, "it was hurting my dad's feelings a little bit. High school was a realization point when I had to accept both sides."

Interracial couples in Korea are often stereotyped as military men with their war brides, and their biracial children often stereotyped as war babies. Since the 1960s and 70s, biracial Koreans in Korea have been stereotyped as "G.I babies" or children with military fathers who work on the U.S. military base because of the history of the U.S. military presence in South Korea and the Korean War. While the older biracial Korean population in Korea, who are now in their 50s and over, may be related to the Korean War, the majority of the recent biracial Korean populations in Korea have parents of immigrant backgrounds. However, stereotypes of biracial Koreans being military children still exist in the Korean American community. Participants

mentioned there were stereotypes attributed to having a non-Korean parent. In this study, three participants had fathers whose occupations were related to the U.S. military; the other eight participants' fathers were in other occupations. Amy, whose Irish American father is working in the finance field, claimed that she did not appreciate the stereotyped of being a "military brat":

Oh, but another big thing was, a lot of people, a lot of older people have a pre-assumption that your father was in the army. Because of the Korean War, and a lot of U.S. soldiers go to Korea and get a lot of Korean women pregnant, and then just left. So I think the older generation had a preconception and I felt them judging me or my mom. And so I hate that. I hated the judgment from the older generation. And I think that also, [I] was resentful. And I don't feel that with the younger generation, of course. So if I meet older people, they'd ask, "Is your father in the army?" and I'd be like, "No! He's Irish!" And I still experience it, so I think that's interesting.

**Relationship between parents.** Participants described how their parents' marital stability and instability (including divorce) and the interaction and relationship between their parents affected their identities. Josh talked about how his parents both make efforts to understand the other's culture and language, and how that affected the way he saw both sides of his identity. He shared that his Chinese father, although his "pronunciation is not the best," would greet his maternal grandparents in Korean, "cus he's doing what he can, and is very respectful." Josh's mom would conversely "try to use Cantonese with my paternal grandparents." Josh explained that parents from different cultures will have "some conflicting cultural values" and the parents will have to negotiate on questions such as "who is to decide?" and "between whose cultural value is to be accepted?" Josh added that because his parents were both Asian and shared an East Asian cultural background, it was less of a problem for them to navigate through their cultural

differences and it was easier for Josh to accept both of his parents' cultures as his own. Family environment is crucial to biracial people's understanding of their heritage, background, and identity – and in particular – the necessity for the parents of biracial children to come to terms with their own interracial differences is crucial (Cauce, Hiraga, et al., 1992).

Robert's case was a bit different from Josh's because Robert's mother was Korean and his father was Black. When Robert's maternal grandparents, who were Korean, first found out that their daughter, Robert's mother, was dating his Black father, they were not too surprised. Since Robert's maternal grandparents immigrated from Korea, Robert talked about how he was "sure they would have preferred a Korean," but "weren't bothered" by his father's race. Robert's grandparents "didn't really mind too much" that his father was Black and "were accepting of it." In fact, Robert explains that for his maternal grandparents the most important thing was their daughter's happiness and "they just wanted her to be with someone who was faithful with her and true to her." However, Robert explains that his father "wasn't that kind of person." His father did not treat his mother very well, and that had affected not only the relationship between Robert's parents, but Robert's relationship with his father. Robert commented that after his parents divorced, he rarely visits his father or his father's side of the family.

Robert also shared that there were cultural differences and "really different perspectives" between Robert's parents on how they viewed family. Robert observed that Black families like his father's tend to be bigger because there are members of the family who are not related that his father would "consider as brothers and sisters." Meanwhile, Robert explained that Korean families like his mother's tended to stay smaller with the only blood-related members. This became a source of conflict between Robert's parents:

Compared to the household that my dad grew up in with all these different people that he considers family, and like all of his cousins and like people who aren't even blood-related, he had all these people always in his life. But for my mom's side of the family, it's literally just me, my mom, her brother, and my grandparents. It's just us five. That's it. There's like nothing else at all. No one else at all. So it's like, our definition of like, families are really really different cus my mom's side of the family, there's five people. On his side of the family, there's like 40, 50, 60, 70 people I don't even - yeah, there's so many people.

Aside from the cultural and familial differences between his parents, Robert mentioned that how they interact, communicate, and treat each other affected him and how he viewed both cultures within himself. Robert stated, "I think the relationship between the parents is super important, like how they talk to each other."

In the case of Mason, his parents come from two countries that have historically been at odds against each other. Korea and Japan have gone through various forms of cultural exchange, war, and political contact which not only underlies their relations but shapes national sentiment. Mason explained that seeing their parents, who were from Japan and Korea, "live in harmony" helped him accept his two identities:

I mean, it's just, seeing my parents coexist with each other; countries that hate each other. I learned by them to cherish my own identity of being biracial. That's what I learned.... I feel like there's a reason why my mom's Korean. But I also love Korea and you know, I have Japanese and Korean friends.

Mason wished that the "international love" of his parents would happen to him one day as well.

**Relationship with siblings.** Research has shown that sisters and brothers can have a significant influence on each other's' development (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982; Sulloway, 1996; Mitchell, 2003). Seven participants of the study had siblings – either older or younger – and four of the seven had siblings who were not “full-siblings”; they were half-brothers or half-sisters. The participants with siblings varied in degree of how close they were with their siblings because of the difference in their physical appearance, interest in their heritages, Korean language proficiency, education, age, and sexual orientation. Although mixed race siblings have similar family and contextual influences, their identifications can be vastly different because they may be racially assigned differently or may or may not identify themselves as similar to each other (Root, 1998). In terms of the role of siblings in identity development, only several participants seemed to have close enough relationships and frequency of contact to be influenced by their siblings. Josh talked about how his older brother “paved the way” for him in terms of his major and interest in the Korean language. Josh’s older brother, who was two years older than Josh, had graduated with the same degree that Josh was currently in and had taken Korean language classes as well. Josh said that his brother encouraged him to learn Korean and modeled how to respect and embrace both of their cultures. Betty talked about how her sister, who is two years older than her, studied abroad at Ewha Woman’s University in Korea and took Korean language courses there when she was in the university. When Betty started attending the university, she had more courage to study abroad and take summer courses in Korea because of the positive experiences her sister had shared with her. Betty and her sister had a mutually encouraging and supportive relationship; now that Betty’s sister has graduated from university, she asked Betty to teach her what she’s learning in the Korean classes to keep up with her Korean. Mason said that his half-sister, who was “full-Korean”, had helped him a lot to connect with his Korean side. He

shared, “My stepsister, she’s full-Korean and she’s fluent in Korean as well. And I started asking my sister what words mean. And my Korean started to become a lot better. And after that, it was really interesting.” Mason mentioned that he had lived with his half-sister and her Korean husband for a couple years before university, and because “they’re all Korean” and “they’re like a full-Korean family”, they helped him learn about the Korean culture and language. As in the case with Hunter, his half-brother’s wife was Black, and he had a nephew who was half-Black half-Asian as well. The diversity in his family encouraged Hunter to accept the diversity he had himself.

**Relationship with extended family.** The relationship, communication, and closeness one has with his or her extended family was important to individuals in this study. Most of the participants, nine out of 11, shared that they had some form of contact with their extended family, if not their grandparents, an aunt or uncle; they were either living in the same household or community, or their extended family members were actively involved in their lives. Lily talked about how she’s “quite close” with her extended family as she keeps in touch with and visits her mother’s side of the family once or twice a year, and her father’s side of the family every other year at the least. Lily commented on how she’s a “bridge” for the families, and how accepting and open both sides of her extended families were to her parents’ interracial marriage, and of her and her brother. She added that she was lucky to have “[Korean] grandparents who are open-minded about American culture.” Robert, who grew up with his Korean grandparents and Korean uncle, explained that he was both influenced by the extended family members on his Korean side and his father’s family, who were predominantly Black. He shared, “I was raised by my mom’s side of the family, so I consider myself more Korean.” Despite “appearing Black”, Robert identified as more Korean. He said he occasionally visits his father’s parents’ house, but

unlike his Korean family, his Black family is much bigger. Robert explained that his paternal grandmother “kind of adopted a lot of people” as family, on his father’s side, “he has a bunch of family friends and cousins” and “even though they’re not blood-related, they consider each other brothers and sisters.” Robert added that he learned about the diversity within the Black community and “different kinds of Black people” through his father’s side of the family and that helped him “balance” his two family heritages.

Josh shared that both his paternal and maternal grandparents lived in the Seattle area, and they had an important influence on him. He wrote:

My immediate family (including my older brother) and I actually lived together with my paternal grandparents and just down the block not more than five houses away lived my maternal grandparents. To this day, I still don't know how my grandparents came to be neighbors, but I knew I was extremely fortunate to be in such a loving community. I still remember the sounds of hot oil sizzling inside my paternal grandma's wok while she prepared meals of Chinese vegetables and rice for everyone, or sipping on lightly seasoned, steaming congee that my grandfather had prepared for breakfast. My grandfather would give me rides to the local bus stop, where I would be picked up to head to school.

Josh continued to describe his experience living with his paternal grandparents:

While I would only use English throughout my day during elementary school, I would return home to converse with my paternal grandparents in Cantonese with what limited phrases I could say since they didn't know any English. Although that time was probably the best possible opportunity to acquire the difficult language...the prominent usage of

English with my parents and discontinued use of Cantonese with my grandparents were unfortunate hindrances to learning it to fluency.

Josh also reported that his immediate family transitioned from living with his paternal grandparents to living with his maternal grandparents, and that it affected him quite a lot:

When my paternal grandparents became too old to take care of themselves, they moved...where one of my retired uncles lived...My maternal grandparents were kind enough to fulfill the roles of my paternal grandparents by continuing to give me rides to our local bus stop and watching me after school, but I also noticed some differences as I transitioned into living with my maternal grandparents. Perhaps the most notable of which was their usage of Korean instead of Cantonese. Although my maternal grandparents knew some conversational English, they used Korean phrases with me frequently, such as "Are you hungry?" or "Don't do that!"...I felt like I was in a completely different world when I was a child.

Josh added that he "felt occasionally lost" with both his paternal and maternal grandparents, because his "grandparents on both sides were very traditional" and he often had to rely on his mother and father to be translators for both sides of his grandparents.

**Summary.** As most participants disclosed, the family seemed to be an important part of their identity. The family component encompasses one's Korean and non-Korean parent, their parenting styles and relationship, influence of siblings, and support and involvement of extended family. Experiences with their parents, both Korean parent and non-Korean parent, significantly contributed to the identity development of participants. All participants with a Korean mother reported that their mother was the most influential figure in their exploration of their Korean identities and initial interest for learning the Korean language. While some Korean mothers had

more typical Korean parenting styles than others, the Korean mothers' involvement and influence seemed to be closely related to the participants' exploration of their Korean heritages and development of their identities. The participants in this study perceived their non-Korean parent's role and their parent's relationship as a crucial element to their views towards their cultures. Although siblings' racial identification and identities can be vastly different despite similar upbringings and environment (Root, 1998), siblings can play an important role in the identity formation of biracial individuals. Regardless of whether or not the participant's sibling was a "full-sibling" or half-sibling, several participants stated that their siblings helped shape their attitudes and interest towards their own heritages. The extended family, including grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins, and family members who weren't necessarily blood-related but were considered family, seemed to be important supports for participants overall identity development.

## **Theme 2: Whose Crew are You?**

The friendship groups and peers in which the participants spend time influenced how they viewed and identified themselves. Friends and peer groups played a significant role in the lives of the biracial Koreans in the study, providing a place of support and safe space to share experiences and connect socially. Noah recognized how the friends he spent time with shaped how he views himself:

The people you hang out with really define who you are. That's a big part of it. When I grew up, I hung out with more Korean friends through elementary school and middle school. But then once I got to high school, I hung out with more White friends, and that changed me also...your friends growing up and who you hang out with most can really affect how you identify yourself with.

Mason echoed Noah's experience:

I feel like who I hang out with influences me a lot. Yeah, when I was in high school, I had a lot of Korean friends so I felt like my Korean side was a little stronger. Now that I hang out with Japanese people more, I consider myself more Japanese. So I guess the environment I'm in and the people I hang out with [are important].

Participants tended to divide their friendship groups by races and ethnic backgrounds: White, non-White, Asian (different ethnic backgrounds), mixed race, Korean-Korean, and Korean American. Non-Korean peers of the biracial Korean American students provided a support network and sense of belongingness.

**White friends.** When Noah was young, he would go back and forth playing with Korean friends and White friends. He often spent time with some of his Korean friends that he was close with because their "moms were friends" and they "became pretty good friends." He had "a lot of White friends" that he "hung out with a bunch of times" as well. In high school, Noah's friendship group was mostly White because he did cross-country running for four years and he met all of his friends there. Noah said as he grew older, not only did he "lost touch with" his Korean friends, but he "kind of went out with more White friends." Referring to White friends, Lily said that she had more "American" friends growing up, and that did not change after she entered university. She said that her main friendship group in the university consisted of American friends - "friends whose parents are American." She explained that she mostly identifies with "American kids" so her "friend groups were just American."

**Non-White friends.** Several non-White friendship groups mentioned by participants were Black friends, Latino friends, and other friends of Asian backgrounds (Thai, Filipino, Vietnamese, Japanese, etc.). Hunter explained how he grew up in Auburn, a city south of Seattle,

and because Auburn was diverse, he prefers to have friends of various backgrounds. Hunter said, “I like being in a mixture...my high school was like, everybody. And a mixture of cultures.” He added that he had “Asian, White, Black, Mexican” friends from “a whole bunch of different majors.” Lily also had a mixed group of non-White friend, mostly of immigrant backgrounds. She said that she had a lot of “friends whose parents are immigrant but are not Korean.”

Other participants talked about how their non-Korean friends of other Asian backgrounds were open to accept them. For example, Emma talked about how she had a lot of Filipino friends or “Asian friends that didn’t feel like they were Asian as well.” Emma explained that within the Asian American community, Asian Americans from Southeast Asian countries - especially Filipino Americans – were not accepted and perceived as Asian because they were darker skinned. Filipino friends were a source of support for Emma:

Filipinos get a lot of crap for, ‘Oh, you’re Asian, but you’re not exactly Asian’, ‘You’re not pale-skinned’, ‘You’re not Eastern Asian.’ So I kind of bonded with my Filipino friends that way. We were all kind of rejects.

Similarly Zoe experienced having more of her friends being “Japanese or American. Or non-Korean.” Zoe said that after taking Korean classes at the university she “made a lot of friends who were interested in Korea,” but were not Korean.

**Biracial friends.** Other half-Asian peers were a source of encouragement and support for the biracial Korean American students because of shared experiences and questions they had regarding their identities. Amy explained how she “had a lot of half-Asian friends” and suggested, “Maybe halfies stick together or something?” describing how half-Asian friends were provided emotional support while she questioned her own identity. When she reached out to other half-Asians, she was able to ask them questions such as “‘Where do you stand?’, ‘What do

you think about the Japanese ways or Korean heritage?” Most of the students were not in schools or environments with peers of diverse backgrounds before starting university. Because of this reason, many of the students I studied were able to connect with biracial and multiracial friends who stated similar experiences after they entered the university. Betty shared that before starting university, she had known only two other half-Koreans, but now she knows many more, and that her closest friend was half-Korean because they “have something in common.” Caden admitted that the university and in Korean language classes on campus provided a space to meet more biracial friends like himself. He said, “Korean language class was the only time I got to be immersed in my culture and it connected me to a lot of other bi-racial Korean students like myself. It was nice and fun to talk about our upbringing.”

**Korean friends: Korean-Korean and Korean American.** Participants were very aware of their racial identities when associating with Korean friends. Caden, who was born and raised in Hawaii, said that although Hawaii was diverse and had a large Korean population, his friends were mostly non-Korean. He said, “I don’t really have any Korean friends. Even now. I can’t think of one [Korean friend]. I wonder why.” Caden assumed that it was because despite the large number American-born Koreans in Hawaii, “they usually speak Korean at home and with each other,” while he couldn’t really speak Korean so it was hard to associate with them.

Most participants said that gradually they felt a disconnect with their Korean friends because of their exclusiveness. For instance, Amy said that she “felt resentment” towards the “whole Korean crew” because she found that “Koreans are very exclusive” and felt she wasn’t “full-Korean” and “couldn’t fit in.” Because of her mixed cultural heritage, Koreans would call her “banana...yellow on the outside, but White on the inside.”

The participants described the divides among Koreans. Emma explained that there were “Korean-Koreans” who came to the U.S. as an adult and retained a strong Korean identity, and “Korean Americans” who were “highly assimilated to White culture.” Emma talked about how she had second-generation Korean American friends in high school, but almost no first-generation friends. She explained how her second-generation Korean American friends were supportive when the Koreans who held a strong Korean identity (mostly first-generation Korean Americans) were not accepting of her and did not respect her Korean heritage:

The only real experience I can think of is when I’m meeting Korean-Americans for the first time. When I was hanging out with a couple of my Korean friends [second-generation Korean Americans], they invited a few more of their Korean friends, and we were all going to go to *noraebang* (karaoke). I spoke with my friend comfortably in Konglish, while the new Korean friends were staring at me uncomfortably. They kept giving me dirty looks and wouldn’t talk to me for the whole night. Until the end. I mentioned to my Korean friend that I felt like that his friends were a bit hateful towards me. He recognized the situation and went up to his friends simply saying, “She’s half Korean, guys.” And after that, they were suddenly so warm towards me.

According to Emma, second-generation Korean Americans were more likely to be her friends as they were less judgmental and more accepting than first-generation Koreans, “They [My Korean American friends] helped me get over snobbish like, FOBs [first-generation Korean Americans] who said things like, ‘Hey, you’re not us’ to me.”

Mason felt strongly about the divide between Korea-Korean peers and Korean-American peers as well. He mentioned that although his best friend from high school was Korean-Korean, after he graduated from high school and entered the university, things changed; he mostly hangs

out with Japanese friends and has only a handful of friends who are “Korean American kids who were born here” that he “clicks with.” Mason described the difference between his Korean-Korean and Korean American peers and friends:

I feel like Korean-Korean people are more girly. The guys are more girly. So like, they care about their self a lot. It’s interesting. Wherever they go, they’d wear like a freakin’ trench coat on and I’m like, ‘Dude. What’s going on, man. What the heck.’ Yeah, and like, they’re like, I don’t know. But American Korean kids though, they don’t care as much. And I think my Korean-Korean friends wear sunscreen. They wanna make themselves look whiter or something. And I’m like, ‘Dude, that’s weird.’ It’s like too girly for me. And that’s something I never clicked on. Korean American guys don’t do that.

Many participants in this study mentioned that they generally felt Korean American peers and acquaintances judging them of their authenticity or Korean heritage based on looks or Korean language fluency, but among Korean Americans, second-generation Korean Americans were less judgmental and more accepting towards them compared to first-generation Korean Americans; thus, were more likely to be their friends.

**Summary.** Along with familial influence, peer influence is an important consideration of biracial individuals. All participants in the study described the impact of their peers and friendship groups on their identity development, and shared that the time spent and frequency of contact with friends served as a major factor in their racial identity construction. According to Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005), mixed race children receive messages from peers and friends about their racial identities and race general, and this shapes their sense of who they are and where they fit in the world. When explaining their friendship groups, most of the participants

in this study considered the racial or ethnic background of their peers: White, non-White, mixed race, Non-Korean Asian, and Korean. Most participants shared how affirmation from peers and friends helped them to embrace a positive view of self and build on it. Many of the participants felt strongly that Filipino and mixed race friends and peers were most supportive of their racial identities.

However, many participants mentioned that some friends and peers rejected or criticized the legitimacy of their racial identity, which led them to explore an identity option that would garner greater social approval. Peers and friends have the power to accept or reject biracial individuals' racial identities (Rockquemore and Laszloffy, 2005). Participants reported that friends and peers of Korean heritage were the ones most likely to reject their Korean identity. Most biracial individuals in this study observed the generational differences within the Korean American friendship groups, and mentioned that while the second-generation Korean Americans were more open to accept them, there were still racially based tensions within the friendships that their physical appearances or languages generated. Although all participants stated that they had Korean friends while growing up, none of them reported having Koreans who they considered their close friends after entering the university.

### **Theme 3: Discovering and Belonging in the Korean Community**

Korean American communities in the United States have a strong sense of collectiveness and group membership, often due to the tendency for Koreans to try to maintain the Korean traditional culture and social networks intact while being Americanized culturally and socially. This “adhesive adaptation” (Hurh & Kim, 1984) may have helped Koreans retain their Korean culture and ethnic identity; however, in the process, it has also excluded those who did not fit the “Korean mold” by declining the “in-group” status.

**Inclusion/Exclusion in Korean American communities.** Participants in this study described their experiences indicating how Koreans have a strong sense of collective identity and an Us/Them mentality. Caden commented on the collectiveness of Koreans:

You know how they say Chinese food is really Americanized? Umm, I don't think you ever hear people say that about Korean food. I feel like they [Koreans] stick to their tradition. It's very authentic no matter where you go. And I think that's how Korean people always stick together too.

In the Korean community, looks, (blood) lineage, and language – I will refer to them as the three L's – are important qualifications for someone to be accepted as an “authentic” Korean. Second-generation Korean Americans who were born in Korea may *look* Korean, have the lineage (both parents are Korean), but may not have the language (not completely fluent); in which case, they may not be accepted as a completely “authentic” Korean. This is similar to Lopez's (as cited in Ho, 2015) view on race: “At different points in time it has been linked to national origin, blood, and phenotype – sometimes all three at once” (p. 11).

In the case of Mason, who is half-Korean and half-Japanese, his outward looks barely indicate that he is of mixed heritage. Mason mentioned that although he is identified as Asian in the general American context, he is still considered mixed in the Korean context because he only had one Korean parent. In fact, Mason stated that he might not have been accepted into the Korean community in high school because he did not have a Korean mother:

[In high school, I] Immediately clicked with Korean people. I guess, they accepted me. You know how there's a tension between Korea and Japan because of the historical stuff. Like, sometimes my friends joke about it and laugh about it. There's nothing I can really say. And one time, like, one of the interesting things that happened was one of my closest

friends said that we got really close because he's Korean and my mom is Korean. (pauses)

I think that means if I were full-Japanese, we wouldn't be that close. And I mean, after entering college, I have not had any Korean friends.

The collectiveness of Koreans is often embodied in the form of exclusiveness. Koreans who choose not to conform to the Korean collective are often ignored, left out, or ostracized.

Participants shared how their mothers were no longer involved or associated with the Korean community, while limiting their interaction with Koreans to a few close Korean friends because of negative past experiences with Koreans. Betty described why her mother was not involved in the Korean communities and the cautionary advice her mother had given her regarding Koreans:

My mom kind of distanced herself from Korean people. And also, my mom has this kind of image of Korean people. I don't know. She's Korean, but she always feels like, she always tells me, "Don't hang out with only Korean people." Cus they'll treat me differently and only see me as White. And they like to gossip all the time. I think she kind of distanced herself too cus she wanted to protect me and my sister, I think. So because of that, we're not part of a Korean American community.

Participants mentioned the Othering of biracial Koreans in Korean settings. The biracial Korean American students expressed similar sentiments such as, "I'm half-Korean, but I'm just me" or "I just feel like I'm just me"; however, when they encountered Koreans, or were in a Korean setting, it was different. They often felt as though they had to "earn my spot there" or "kind of have to let everyone know" that they weren't just speaking Korean because they like Korean culture, but because they were of Korean heritage. Mason pointed out that it was ironic for Koreans to be so exclusive, and yet judgmental. He observed that while Koreans had a collective sense of self, they cared a lot about how people viewed themselves. Mason suggested

that this was a reason why if someone didn't look Korean or speak Korean, they would not be included. He further explained that sometimes he felt like Koreans were not transparent with him, or with each other:

Now that I hang out with more Japanese people, I feel like Korean people have a lot of, I don't know, they kind of sugar-coat themselves. I feel like they do. And they don't really show their true identity. That's what I feel like. But hanging out with Japanese people, I can see their true selves. I mean, at least I feel like I can see it. Cus like, I don't know.

Korean people always try their best, ultimate best, to *look* the best. But Japanese people, they do, but not as much...And I felt a little bit uncomfortable with the always-look-the-best people.

**The Korean Immigrant Churches.** One of the representative places that strong ethnic group membership is seen is at the Korean American churches. According to (H. A. Choi, 2015), Korean immigrants “rediscover their communal ethnic self, reformulate their collective identity, and form a new community in a foreign land” (p.129) through many Korean immigrant churches. Many of the participants and participants' families experienced negative experiences and rejection from the Korean American churches, which discouraged them from continuing being connected with them. Emma started attending a Korean church in high school, which was when she first started to question her Korean identity. In other contexts such as Emma's home, friendship groups, school, and the neighborhood she lived in, there were only a few Koreans that were noticeable and had an influence on her. However, when she started attending the Korean church, she immediately started receiving comments about her right to belong and was questioned about her Korean identity:

I started being told, 'You look White' or 'You're not one of us' and that's when - that's the first time I was ever thought that I wasn't Korean. Cus like everywhere else there weren't Koreans and so I was the only proclaimed Korean. But in [the church], there were a lot more Koreans being like, 'Hey, you're like only half of us' or like they like, kind of push it down. And it really clashed with who I identified with.

The Korean churches served as a place where some study participants were included and were given group membership, while others were excluded and were not. Because most of the members of the congregation at Korean churches are Korean immigrant families, interracial couples or multicultural families are often not accepted as full members, as they are not "full" Korean. Robert talked about the hurtful comments that his mother received when she brought his Black father to the Korean church:

My mom used to go to church all the time, yeah, like a Korean church, like Korean people. And then, she brought my dad to church one time, and then she got a lot of comments from other Korean people. They're like, 'Why are you dating this Black guy' or 'You should only be with Black guys who are like celebrities' and things like that. And like, that really bothered her a lot. So she stopped going there.

The Korean immigrant churches are often reject those who are non-Korean, but are also exclusive towards those who are half-Korean or mixed. Noah explains how he does not go to church anymore after his experience attending the Korean church his mother attends:

Before college, I used to go to Korean church with my mom...but I quit going when I was a senior [in high school]...it was pretty much an all-Korean church...I never fitted in. I hated it. The Koreans were pretty clique-y too. They really stick with themselves. Not really open to other people...When I was there, I felt more 100% American, rather than

half-Korean or any Korean at all...I didn't feel like I belonged in a Korean place...I actually stopped believing in God during my time at the church which was part of the reason why I made the decision to stop going.

Although Korean immigrant churches in the U.S. may play a key role in providing a sense of belonging and a foundation to build ethnic identity for first- and second-generation Korean immigrants, it can also be a site where the Korean ethnic group is exclusive and intolerant towards individuals who are not “fully Korean.”

Lily's mother, who is White, acknowledged this characteristic of Korean immigrant churches. She actively sought out a Korean church and started taking her children to the Korean church when Lily was around seven years old. Although Lily's father had never been religious, Lily's mother was, and she was aware of the benefits of being a part of a Korean immigrant church, especially for her children. Lily remembers attending the Korean American church since she was in elementary school, but explains why she didn't feel like a part of it:

I didn't really identify with other Korean American kids as much. I think it was because other Korean American kids had parents who were both immigrants to the U.S. so they have the shared experience of having Korean at home and American at school. But I umm, I kind of was a regular American kid that happened to have a Korean dad. So yeah, it was a little bit different.

In the case of Hunter, he attended a Korean church with a “90% Korean” congregation for a while with his mother. He expressed that “it was weird” and stated, “I was never religious so I only went there [the Korean church] because of my mom. But I mean, it was cool to see how traditional Korean, I guess not traditional Korean, like how different Koreans lived and stuff like

that.” While Hunter appreciated “stuff religion had to offer”, it seemed like he did not enjoy the experience entirely.

**Summary.** As most participants disclosed, collectivism is one of the most salient characteristics of Korean culture. While the strong feeling of collectiveness or “collective” identity may provide a sense of belonging to those who are considered as members, it may also exclude those who are not. Most participants in the study reported that they had experience with Koreans at school, church, or in the larger community who did not acknowledge their Korean heritage. All participants shared that they are not a part of any Korean American community organizations, associations, or groups, and do not actively seek participation in the Korean American community. Acceptance in the Korean community and being recognized as an “authentic” member was not only an individual issue for the participants of this study. Nine out of eleven participants reported that their Korean parent was ostracized, excluded, ignored, or at the least unwelcomed by the Korean American community despite being “full-blood” Koreans who spoke the language fluently. Despite the fact that they could have been considered an “authentic” member, they were not granted “authentic” membership merely because of their “un-Korean” choice to marry a non-Korean partner.

In terms of Korean churches, seven participants who had experience attending a Korean immigrant church acknowledged that Korean immigrant churches were a unique space where they observed the collective nature of Koreans and a strong sense of inclusion/exclusion. The Korean immigrant churches participants attended were predominantly if not exclusively Korean – they consisted of Korean immigrants and their children. Almost all participants who had experience attending a Korean immigrant church initially went because their Korean parent was either attending, or intended to attend the church. Emma, one of the participants stated that it was

at a Korean immigrant church that she felt “out of place” as a Korean for the first time ever. The social experiences at the Korean immigrant churches negatively influenced most participants’ search or interest in the Christian faith, and led to many leaving Christianity as a whole. While some Korean parents of the study participants continued attending the church after their children left, most of them seemed to have moved to a church with a more diverse congregation or discontinue attending church.

## Chapter 4: Looks, Language, the University, and Changing Identities

### Theme 4: Looking the Part to Feel the Part

Race is generally considered an unambiguous social category that is easily recognized and readily used in social perception (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). There have been many scholars who have explored the phenotypic variability in the United States and visual racial ambiguity in relation to race as a social construct (Chao, Hong, & Chiu, 2013; Chen & Hamilton, 2012; Freeman, Pauker, Apfelbaum, & Ambady, 2010; Krosch, Berntsen, & Amodio, 2013). Participants in this study agreed that physical appearance, phenotype, and visible traits were important in their racial identity and how they were accepted both in the Korean community and the larger U.S. context. Participants said that biracial Korean Americans who look like “one race or another” are more likely to be accepted both in the Korean and American context because they had less of an “ambiguous appearance.” For example, Emma observed, “...the half-Asians that look outwardly like one race or another. They don’t exactly look mixed, so they grow up definitely more like ‘Ah, I get accepted.’ So I feel like those people are much more charismatic.”

**Racially ambiguous appearances.** Many participants reported that because they didn’t look like they belonged in one racial group or another, which affected how other people identified and treated them, as well as their own self-concept and their racial identity. Betty wrote how she was often perceived one way or another by others and how made her feel:

Before entering the university, I remember always questioning my identity as being a biracial Korean American. I would wonder if I was more “White” or more “Asian.” Most of the times, this question stemmed from those around me making remarks on my physical appearance. Those that were non-Asian would always say that I look more Asian than White and those that were Asian would say I look more White than Asian. This used to

always confuse me a lot, especially in my middle school and high school years. I had one friend in high school that said that I was their only Asian friend, even though I am also Caucasian. Another friend would call me her “little Asian.”

Betty, who is half-White half-Korean and lived in Hawaii prior to moving to Colorado, looked back to an event in middle school that upset her, even thinking about it after many years had passed:

I remember a time in middle school when all the 8<sup>th</sup> graders were taking the annual Colorado Student Assessment Program exam. For some strange reason, our personal information was already filled out (usually we have to fill out our personal information prior to taking the exam). What shocked me was that on the race category, my race was marked as both Asian and Pacific Islander. Where in the world did Pacific Islander come from?! At the time, I figured that because I was born and previously lived in Hawaii before moving to Colorado, they labeled me as Pacific Islander. But also the fact that they marked Asian as well made me think that through the eyes of non-Asians, I am considered Asian, and not even Caucasian.

Noah noted how his physical traits affected his identity:

Cus when I look in the mirror, I see myself as White, cus I have White skin and brown hair. But at that rate, I look White in a way, but then I feel Korean every now and then. I do some things that are Korean.

In addition to the confusion that came with appearing to be racially ambiguous, some participants described how this outward racial identification influenced their own racial identities. Robert shared how his appearance and how he was racially classified became a part of his racial identity:

I think just because of like how my appearance is, I really *kind of* look Black. I don't really look very Korean. So I guess I consider myself Black. But the thing is, I was raised by my [Korean] mom. And so it's like, even though I appear Black, I would consider myself more Korean because of the way I've been and the way I grew up. But like, I guess I have to consider myself Black.

As noted by Robert, there seemed to be a disconnect between how people viewed and perceived him, and who he identified himself as. Laughing lightly, Robert shared an event when his friend was surprised that he, who appeared Black, spoke Korean:

One experience I had in college that made me think a lot about my racial identity was meeting a new Korean friend from my biology class. I was going to a study session led by my professor, but I went to the wrong room along with a few other people who happened to go the wrong way. One of the girls was Korean, but I couldn't tell for sure until I was looking at her looking at her phone and she was on Kakaotalk. So naturally I acted kinda creepy and looked over her shoulder because I know that Koreans use Kakaotalk a lot in the way that Chinese use WeChat. She initially seemed really bothered that I was looking over her shoulder, but when I spoke Korean to her she was really surprised and turn extremely friendly. Later I found out that she spent equal time growing up in Korea and America so she was quite fluent in both languages. I asked her to lunch and we went together and it was super fun. We went to a Korean restaurant on the Ave, and since the staff there are Korean, I used the little bit of Korean I knew to communicate and my friend was so surprised. Several times she had said "Oh my god, it's so weird that you're speaking Korean, but it's cool!"

Some of the participants experienced differing responses by others due to their ambiguous appearance and phenotypical ambiguity. Betty, who has an older sister, explained how even with the same parents, she and her older sister looked very different in terms of physical appearance: she looks more like her mother, and her sister looked more like her father. Betty talked about her trip to Korea with her mother and sister, and the experience she had when a Korean man approached her sister, and not her, to practice English. She explained how confused she was at the time because although she and her sister were both half-Korean half-White, because of their looks, her sister was perceived as the “more American” one in Korea. Amy, who has five other half-Korean half-White siblings, shared that of all six children, she was the “most to identify with Korea.” Most of her siblings, however, didn’t identify themselves as Korean. She said that her siblings “acknowledge that our mother is Korean, but not that they are Korean.” This confirms Root’s (1998) research on mixed heritage siblings on the causes of siblings within the same family to racially identify in different ways, including phenotype, neighborhood, birth order, and personality. Amy described the ambiguity that came from how she looked and how others identified and classified her:

Cus I feel White people still - there’s a hierarchy of White and then there’s Asian, and even within Asians, there’s White Asians or tan Asians and things like that. Just those things, I started questioning in high school. But in high school, there were a lot of Koreans. And then the Koreans, people don’t usually think I’m Korean. Or especially Koreans don’t think I’m Korean. And White people think I’m Asian. And then Black people think I’m Spanish. I don’t know why. So it was very confusing. Just because I didn’t know - if Koreans don’t think I’m Korean, that must mean I’m not Korean. And because White people don’t think I’m White, I must not be White.

**Looking ‘plain Asian’: Appearing to be monoracial.** Meanwhile, participants with one Korean parent and one non-Korean parent of Asian background said that in the American context they did not have many experiences feeling pressured to self-identify with one group or another because of their looks because they were mostly identified as ‘Asian.’ Participants explained that although they were biracial, they appeared to be “plain Asian”, so they had less of a problem to “look the part” and prove their legitimacy as an individual of Asian descent. The half-Korean half-Asian participants shared that in the Seattle area or Washington state, people generally do not assume a bi-ethnic or multiethnic background by their looks and consider them to be “just Asian” rather than biracial Asian. Hunter, whose mother is Korean and father is from Hong Kong, commented that when he views his racial identity, he thinks more about his being Asian than being biracial Asian:

I mean, people view Asian as like, Asian. Like everybody calls me Chinese and I’m fine with that. So I feel like being biracial Korean, and being biracial with another Asian race, is like, it’s a bit more like, on the down. Nobody really separates it. Nobody says like, ‘Yo, you’re biracial.’ They just say, ‘You’re Asian.’... Cus obviously we face problems like, just being Asian in general. And it’s not specifically like Chinese, not specifically Korean.

Hunter believed that as much as he was proud to say he was Korean, he didn’t think about being Korean that much because people he interacts with – even his friends – would consider him as Asian rather than biracial Asian or biracial Korean. Hunter gave an example of this: “Whenever there’s an Asian sign, my friends would go, ‘Hunter, what does that sign say?’ and stupid stuff like that.” Among the half-Korean half-Asian participants, Hunter was one of the four participants who felt strongest about being identified as Asian instead of mixed.

However, some half-Korean half-Asians said that even though they were viewed as the “Asian race” in the American context, and their appearance “matched” Koreans, in the Korean context “pure Koreans” often distinguished themselves based on more specific physical traits. One participant, Zoe, said that within the Korean context, mixed Korean and Asian biracial individuals may be questioned about their authenticity as a Korean member based on how physical characteristics such as how round or almond-shaped their eyes were, their hair color, or other traits. Participants also mentioned that there were other elements of looks that could be manipulated, that served as indicators of a Korean: dressing like a Korean, wearing makeup in a Korean style, hairstyle, and Korean mannerisms. Furthermore, all five biracial Koreans of Korean and other Asian descent said that although they may pass as Korean, there were “more hurdles to jump over” to be accepted as culturally authentic Koreans.

**Physical appearance as form of Korean racial authentication.** Biracial Koreans seemed to understand the role of physical appearance as a form of authentication of a racial group; being accepted and claiming legitimacy based on looks. Racial awareness of the biracial Korean individuals heightened in a predominantly Korean context. Emma, who is half-White half-Korean, shared a time when she went on a retreat with the youth group at the Korean church she was then attending during high school. She was visibly upset as she recalled her experience:

I was attending a Korean church at the time, and out of the youth group I was the only half-White and half-Korean member. There was one other member, but she was half-Chinese and half-Korean. During this retreat, I had already felt slightly uncomfortable being forced to get involved with other youth members, particularly the Korean members who were fresh from Korea. I already felt slightly uncomfortable, but I found comfort in bonding with the Korean-Americans. While walking to lunch, I was talking with the half-

Chinese and half-Korean girl. The conversation took a weird turn when we were talking about being half. I commented on how I felt uncomfortable but it was, whatever, because I'm at least half and I felt decently okay being around super Korean people, especially since I can understand some Korean. I didn't realize that the Chinese-Korean girl couldn't understand Korean at all, so defensively she said, "I can't understand Korean, but at least I'm more Asian than you." After her comment, I became overly conscious on the fact that I looked White. For the rest of that retreat I felt trapped in this camp where I felt as though I didn't belong. This led me to becoming extremely conscious on how I look. I always felt as though I needed to prove to others that I am Korean. Shortly after that retreat, I stopped attending the church due to too much stress being in large Korean groups. This was also when I started hanging out with more diverse groups because I felt as though I couldn't hang out with white people or Korean people.

As can be seen from Emma's experience, racial awareness and sensitivity about physical appearance is heightened in predominantly Korean settings for biracial Koreans. This may lead to unspoken tensions not only between racially "pure Koreans" and biracial Koreans, but also between and among biracial Koreans as well. Also, it could be inferred that Koreanness and Korean authenticity is constructed where various factors such as physical appearances, generational differences ("Korean members who were fresh from Korea" vs. "Korean-Americans), cultural differences ("super Korean people"), and relative realness ("at least half", "at least I'm more Asian than you") overlap and intersect.

**Summary.** The physical features, appearance, skin color, and visible traits can determine how biracial individuals are identified by others and how they identify themselves. Because the social identity is linked to individuals' racial and cultural identities, oftentimes how one is

identified by society and how one self-identifies is intertwined and overlaps. Although all participants discussed the influences of their looks on their identity development, they also disclosed that *how* they are mixed serves as an important determinant to the identification process as well. All participants agreed that there are societal preconceptions in the U.S. about how members of a race should “look one way or another.” Participants also discussed how they observed hierarchies within racial groups and ambiguity in assigning races to people who didn’t “look like one race.” Participants, who had siblings who were also biracial, had varying experiences in terms of society’s perceptions and self-identifications. Despite having the same parents, many participants admitted that their biracial siblings had different physical features than them that often led to assigning them in different racial categories, depending on the context.

In terms of racial identification based on physical appearance in the American and Korean context, half-Korean half-Asian participants seemed to have slightly differing experiences from those who were half-Korean and half-non-Asian. Five participants in the study were half-Korean half-White, one participant was half-Korean half-Black, and five participants were half-Korean half-Asian (of a different ethnicity than Korean). The half-Korean half-White and half-Korean half-Black participants said they were more “noticeably mixed” than their half-Korean half-Asian counterparts. Hence compared to half-Korean half-Asian participants who “looked Asian” seemed to give society mixed messages about their skin color and non-White physical appearance. While they were not “included” in the White race, they were not accepted as “full-Korean.” However, as stated by most biracial individuals of this study, Korean authenticity is not one-dimensional or static; ‘being Korean’ involves looking or appearing Korean, speaking the language, retaining traditional values, acknowledging to gender roles, utilizing ‘Korean’ communication patterns, and understanding the culture and the like.

### **Theme 5: Korean Heritage Language is a “Door to a Whole ‘nother World”**

Based on the interviews with biracial individuals in this study, a number of reasons were identified as key to why the Korean heritage language was important to them and why they decided to learn Korean heritage language at the university. Most of the participants lived in neighborhoods in cities with significant Korean American populations, and were exposed to the Korean heritage language through their Korean parent, Korean peers and friends, the Korean immigrant church, or Korean heritage language schools. Most study participants were not in an environment in which they had to utilize or communicate in the Korean language on a regular or daily basis. Almost all participants in this study seemed to possess a substantial amount of eagerness and passion that enabled them to pursue Korean language education at the university.

**Motivations to learn Korean.** The study participants of the study reported how the Korean language served as an important tool and resource in connecting with Korean family members, constructing their Korean identity, claiming the legitimacy of their Korean heritage, and being accepted by the Korean community.

*Connecting with family.* One of the main reasons that the study participants were learning Korean was because they wanted to speak Korean with their families. Many of the students said that their motivation to learn Korean came from wanting to speak Korean with their Korean mothers. Others indicated that they were learning Korean because they wanted to communicate with extended family members. Josh, whose family lived close to his maternal grandparents, said that before he learned Korean at the university, his communication with his maternal grandparents were mostly in English, with a few Korean phrases that he had learned. The ability to speak in Korean was one of the main motivations for Josh to learn Korean. He can speak in

Korean with his grandparents, and they also exchange emails in Korean now. Caden stated that he decided to learn Korean because he was “the only person on [my] mom’s side of the family that could not speak Korean” and it was “quite difficult” and made him “feel a little self-conscious at times.” He added that the older he got, the “more disconnected” he felt from both his Korean and Japanese cultures, and being able to speak with both sides of his grandparents in Korean and Japanese was important for him. Betty explains that she was able to connect more with her Korean family who were in Korea after learning the language at the university:

Since I began studying Korean at UW...I also feel like I can connect more with my relatives in Korea. I also feel like I can connect more with my relatives in Korea. Before, only two of my cousins could speak English, so every time I go to Korea, I could only talk with my cousins. Now, however, I feel like the desire to communicate is mutual. I am learning Korean and my other cousins are learning English as well. When I went to Korea last summer, I was able to speak with my eldest cousin...While I was in Korea, I also got to meet my uncle on my mom’s side for the first time. He asked my mom why she didn’t teach my sister and I Korean when we were younger, in which he added that Korean is one of our mother languages, so we should be fluent in it. It made me happy when he said that because it implied that my sister and I are Korean, so we should be able to speak the language. I felt like I fitted in with my Korean family more than before.

***Constructing Korean identity.*** Another reason why biracial Korean American students decided to learn Korean at the university was because they understood that the Korean language was important to their Korean identity and how Korean they felt. Many participants explained that second-generation Korean Americans, “even though they’re American-born, they [second-generation Korean Americans] usually speak it at home and they speak Korean to each other”

because generally they have two immigrant Korean parents whose native language is Korean. Compared to second-generation Korean Americans, biracial Korean Americans shared they were not as exposed to the Korean language or may not have used it as much because it was only spoken by one of their parents. However, most of the participants acknowledged that the Korean language played a vital role in constructing the “Korean part” of their identities. For example, Josh said that “people don’t realize that language is associated with being half-Korean,” but for him, language was an important part of his Korean identity. Zoe stated that before she took Korean, she had only visited Korea once, and did not really care too much about her Korean heritage:

Because before that [first visit to Korea], I had negative images of Korea just cus like, I knew I was Korean but I didn’t identify myself as Korean. I was really shy and I didn’t really like myself being Korean. Because I didn’t know anything about Korea at all. But because of my last name, people would just ask if I could speak Korean, so I had to respond like, ‘I’m Korean in blood, but I can’t speak Korean. I can’t identify myself as Korean.’ So it was just, I was just like shy. I was kind of disrespecting my Korean side of my heritage because I didn’t appreciate it. But after going to Korea, it made me realize Korea’s such a great country. It just changed my whole image of Korea. Which is probably why I started wanting to learn more about my Korean side. It was just the trigger that helped me realize that I would learn more about my heritage. I appreciate being Korean now.

Robert also talked about how even though he is half-Korean, he felt like he was “missing a big part of my own heritage and culture” and could not “relate to other Korean people” before he learned how to speak Korean. Betty writes that since she started studying Korean at the

university, she felt as though she has “become more connected with my Korean self.” For biracial Koreans like Noah, the Korean language is not only a part of discovering his Korean roots and “becoming closer to my [his] Korean half,” but it also presents a different perspective and worldview:

To me it [Korean language] means like a door to a whole ‘nother world...another world is out there...because I was introduced to Korean culture and the language...I can take a step back and see, ‘Hey, there’s other stuff out there. There’s different things going on.’ It’s not just about me [or] what I am.

***Claiming legitimacy in the Korean community.*** In addition to learning Korean to communicate with family and for their own Korean identities, the study participants wanted to learn Korean to claim legitimacy and to be accepted by the Korean community. Participants explained that when they told Korean people that they were half-Korean, the question that would immediately follow was whether or not they could speak the language. Prior to learning Korean, participants felt “ashamed”, “shocked”, or “self-conscious” about the fact that they couldn’t speak Korean, and were not accepted by Koreans because of the lack of the ability to speak Korean. The ability to speak Korean and having Korean language skills empowered the students to affirm their Korean heritage but also claim legitimacy and be accepted by Koreans.

***Reasons for learning Korean at the university.*** There are two main reasons participants decided to learn Korean at the university: learning Korean as a foreign language was not available in the public school system; and Korean heritage language schools prior to the university were either unsatisfactory or insufficient.

***Lack of Korean language education in the public school setting.*** Prior to entering the university, the participants explained that they did not have the opportunity to learn Korean in

the public school systems. Mason talked about his limitations to speaking and writing Korean prior to entering the university. He stated, “In order to speak a language, you need to have fundamentals” but he never had the opportunity. Mason “knew how to read, write, a little bit” but “never learned how to do it.”

The participants pointed out that foreign language classes were either not required, or they had limited options of foreign languages to choose from. Noah explains how he wasn’t able to learn Korean in high school although he wanted to:

It [Korean language] wasn’t available in high school. It was only Spanish, German, and French. So I never got a chance to do it before....[In high school,] I took Spanish. Cus they said to get into the university, they recommended to take at least three years of a language. It was Spanish, French, or German. So I took Spanish. It was easiest and most applicable.

Like Noah, many participants had taken a foreign language in high school for 2-3 years because Korean language classes were not an option, and because the high schools required a certain number of language course credits. They shared that they took “bare minimum [foreign language classes] to graduate” and they “never” have used the foreign language they learned in high school after graduating.

When Lily first started attending the university, she did not know what she wanted to major in. However, when she realized that she had opportunities to study Korean at the university, she did not hesitate to take classes:

It’s [Taking Korean classes] just always been a good thing to do. I’ve never had a solid plan for my life. Whatever I do, it would be good if I knew Korean. I didn’t know what I

wanted to major in, so I said, ‘I’ll go and take different classes, I’ll take Korean on the side. Because no matter what I do, it’ll be good taking Korean.’

While Lily explored different fields in which to major in, she took Korean classes throughout the first three years at the university, which led to her to decide that she wanted to become a translator after she graduates from the university.

*Not-so-helpful Korean language heritage schools.* Another reason participants decided to learn Korean at the university is because they did not find Korean heritage language schools very helpful. Most of the students had experiences attending Korean heritage language schools before attending the university, but did not continue for various reasons. Some participants said that the Korean heritage language schools were not “fun or engaging”, “too unorganized and everyone was at a different level”, “pointless”, and “it was kind of hard because it was more Korean-Korean focused.” Oftentimes, heritage language learners at Korean heritage language schools have different proficiencies, linguistic statuses and backgrounds, which makes it hard for the teacher to target audiences for the lessons. On the other hand, differences in the immigration generations and cultural differences of teachers and students at the heritage language schools affect the students’ willingness or motivation to continue to learn Korean. Danico (2014) found that many Korean American students give up learning Korean because the Korean heritage language classes were difficult to engage with because of cultural differences with teachers, most of who were educated in Korea and had conflicting ideas about U.S.-educated Korean students’ attitudes and learning. Josh acknowledged that his mother had taken him to Korean heritage language school when he was young, but “when you’re a kid, you don’t want to learn sometime,” and it was hard for him because the teachers had “Korean teaching styles” which were different from the teachers at his public school.

There was a lack of racial diversity in Korean heritage language schools that the participants attended as well. Amy said that she and her siblings were sent to Korean heritage language schools from a young age, and “it was torturous.” She shared that it was hard sometimes being “surrounded by full Korean kids” because they would say things like “Why are you half-Korean?” Noah remembers that he started going to the Korean heritage language school because his mother wanted him to, and noticed he was the only biracial Korean in the whole school:

I remember clearly when I started. I was the only half-Korean there. Cus everyone else is like Korean kids, younger kids. But I went there for a long time. And I got to go up to the second highest class. Just cus I went there for so long. I still don’t know what it was, but I still got to the highest level. And by the time it was my last year, because I decided to stop going, I noticed that there were more half-Koreans throughout the time I was there. So I always tell people I started this trend. It’s all me, it’s all me. (laughs)

Korean heritage language schools were not ineffective completely. Some participants stated that Korean heritage language schools were helpful because they built a foundation for speaking and learning Korean, and helped the study participants connect with Korean culture. Lily acknowledged that although the time she attended the Korean heritage language school “didn’t last very long” and she was not able to make many friends there, it helped her build foundations for her future Korean language learning:

My mom was always really interested in me learning Korean....Umm, so when I was young, she sent me to church Korean school. Where they like teach you the alphabet. So I’ve actually known the alphabet for a really long time since I was young. I was able to read Korean signs but didn’t know what they meant.

Betty also shared that since she attended the Korean heritage language school, she “was always able to read and write in Korean” – even before entering the university. However, much like Noah’s case, Betty wasn’t able to understand what she was reading or writing because she didn’t have opportunities to advance her knowledge of the Korean language. Amy, who had attended Korean heritage language school for seven years before attending the university, explains that she is “grateful” she went to Korean heritage language school because “they teach you Korean language and culture, and Korean drama sometimes.” While Betty shared that she learned the basic foundations of Korean language learning at the Korean heritage language school classes, she reported that it was other factors such as her mother’s continuous efforts, extended family, and her interest that helped her learn and grow in Korean.

**Experiences of Korean heritage language learning at the university.** All participants shared that their experiences of Korean heritage language education at the university were positive, and they learned a lot despite the amount of work that was required. It was challenging for almost all participants because it was their first time to learn Korean grammar and vocabulary in a structured manner in a limited amount of time. Betty, who had taken the First Year Korean class series the previous year, continued to mention the difficulties of learning new grammar points and vocabulary:

It’s [Second Year Korean classes] going well so far. But, we already covered the first new topic. We just finished it last week, and I think it wasn’t that bad, but it’s starting to get more harder. We’re learning more complex grammar so I had to ask my language partner for help. Because it’s getting a little hard. Compared to last year, it’s definitely more harder. Last year, especially first quarter last year, it wasn’t that challenging for me

since I already had very basic understanding of Korean language, but this quarter now since we're learning new grammar and vocabulary it's getting much more harder.

Similarly, Hunter talked about how difficult taking Korean classes were, and how discouraging the grades he received were to his motivation to learn the language. He also explained that there was an added pressure because he was of Korean heritage:

Honestly, it was really hard for me. It was last year and I was, it was the first year I got into my house, so really it adjusting to the house...and foreign language is a lot of work. And any language, especially Korean out of anything [requires a lot of work]. I feel like if I took Spanish I would have been fine. But with Korean, it was just a lot of burden with that...That was really difficult. Honestly, I was not proud of my grades in my class. But I want to eventually learn more. By myself.

Several participants seemed to have been overwhelmed by the amount of work and time the Korean classes required. Emma explained her relationship with the Korean classes was a love-hate relationship:

I like it because there's a lot of content and we get to learn a lot in a little time. Especially since I'm graduating soon. But I hate it for that same reason. It's hard to keep up with it and memorize, umm, 50 words a week, just for one test. And try to process and remember it as a word we know, and register it. So it's really difficult, but the grammar and stuff is really useful and I can see how I can use it. I mean, it just makes my, my speaking more flavorful, I guess? I don't know how else to say it.

As Emma recognized, many participants appreciated being able to use the Korean they learned even though they felt the classes were “hard”, “challenging” or “really difficult.” Noah explained that it was challenging to juggle the work required for the Korean classes and his other classes in

the science field, but how fruitful it was in the end, “And I actually learned a lot too. I learned vocab and could make complete sentences by myself. Still more work to do but, I’m a lot better than I used to be.”

Many participants shared that they had learned a lot about Korean culture, made many friends through the courses, and have kindled their passion for learning Korean. Zoe, who had never learned Korean outside of the home, shared that the Korean classes at the university helped her reconnect with her Korean heritage:

It [Korean classes at the university] was a completely new experience. I didn’t even know how to read Hangul [the Korean written language] or anything. So I had to start from the beginning. But after learning one year, I felt like I learned a lot. I can read it now - it’s not that hard to learn the letters. And I can read it and understand a lot of the simple words that come up in the posters or airports. I feel like I have more exposure to Korea now...Now that I started getting myself learning about Korea, it got me to appreciate a lot more about my Korean side now. Since I didn’t have the opportunity to until I came here. Like Zoe, many participants in the study acknowledged that the Korean classes at the university helped them learn more about their heritage and build a foundation for learning Korean language and the culture. According to Noah, the Korean heritage language classes helped him “really got a touch in for the Korean culture and language” and “expanded Korean culture” for him. Mason, a soccer fanatic, compared the Korean classes to sports:

I think, as I said, knowing language and getting better at it requires knowing the fundamentals. For example, playing sports. I like playing sports, and if you want to play better, you need to know the fundamentals of it. I mean like, that’s why I decided to take Korean 101. I didn’t know any fundamentals so I decided to take it.

Many participants echoed Mason's opinion stating they knew "basic things," could "apply Korean," "learn a lot of advanced terms," because they took Korean at the university.

For many participants, their peers were a source of encouragement of learning Korean. Whereas prior to attending the university, the Korean language learning environment predominantly consisted of monoracial Korean immigrant peers, biracial individuals found that at the university, most of the students were those who were of non-Korean heritage but were interested in Korean culture, or had a strong desire to learn. The fun, open, and relaxed environment seemed to help the participants in this study feel comfortable learning Korean. Caden describes his peers in the Korean classes, and how they were a positive influence on his Korean language learning:

I feel like now, the students are excited to learn...I enjoyed it because students were more outgoing and very excited to learn and participate a lot. And they were all mixed race or not even Korean. And I was like, 'Why are there White people? They're more Korean than me. They watch Korean drama' and so that was bizarre. But I don't think I learned Korean language very much. It was just fun to be around.

Similarly, Noah stated that he "enjoyed the people in the class" because the "people are cool and the students are awesome." He said that he had friends that he made in the Korean heritage language classes that he still keeps in touch with after the class ended, which was a valuable thing he attained aside from "learning a lot."

**Korean heritage language acquisition, maintenance, and development.** Korean heritage language was important for participants in this study because it was a means to connect with their Korean family and friends, construct their identity, and claim legitimacy in the Korean community. A common reason for biracial Korean participants to take Korean heritage language

classes at the university was because the opportunities to learn Korean were either not available or limited. Participants who learned Korean at Korean heritage language schools prior to attending the university said that it was not available. Three participants reported that along with personal reasons for learning Korean at the university, they had academic reasons as well. Some participants had not met their foreign language requirements in high school, or the university majors they chose required additional foreign language credits. Regarding foreign language requirements, the University of Washington (2015) states:

The College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Social Work, and the College of Education require foreign language instruction beyond what is needed to be admitted to the University. If you are a native speaker of a language other than English, or if you had three years of a single foreign language in high school, you already meet this requirement. Otherwise, you must complete the third college quarter of a foreign language with a grade of at least 2.0, take a placement test that places you into the fourth college quarter of that language, or pass a language proficiency test.

The three participants, who mentioned that they were taking Korean heritage language at the university also for academic reasons, had already fulfilled their high school foreign language credit; their majors were international relations, philosophy, and English (all of which are a part of the College of Arts and Sciences).

The findings indicate that biracial Korean Americans all had mostly positive experiences taking Korean heritage classes at the university, even though some found the course load time-consuming and challenging. Six participants took Korean heritage language classes for one year (two to three quarters), and five participants took Korean heritage language classes for two years (six quarters). The six participants who did not take more classes after their three quarters talked

about how the Korean classes had too many assignments, quizzes, and exams to keep up with and they would rather continue learning in their own time. When talking about why he chose not to take more Korean classes at the university, Noah said:

I think it'd [Second year Korean classes at the UW] be a little harder than I would want it to be. And plus, I could always ask my mom for help too. Or watch Korean shows with her. Which is what I've been trying to do. (pause) I'm not ready for that extra commitment it may take. (laughs)

Similar to Noah's case, Hunter expressed:

But I want to eventually learn more [Korean]. By myself. Probably this summer. Rosetta Stone or something like that...And I don't like keeping up with the schedule. If I ever need help, I could just call my mom and I could always learn on my own time. There's really no rush right now.

The five participants who decided to continue taking another year of Korean did so because they found it helpful and enjoyable to learn. None of the participants took more than six quarters of Korean classes at the University of Washington.

Although all participants expressed the desire to follow up with Korean language learning, most did not continue keeping up with Korean language learning after they completed their classes at the University of Washington. Caden was skeptical about the maintenance of his Korean language, "Hmm, for those of us who are learning Korean as a second language, do we go on utilizing it? I mean, was it just to learn more about our background?" With regards to the usage of Korean after taking the 101-Korean language series at the university, Zoe explained, "I don't use Korean. Not very much. Not at all. So yeah, I learned a lot in Korean 101 to 103, but I haven't had the chance to use it and I probably forgot a lot about it. Which is embarrassing."

Hunter reported that after the Korean language class series, “I say [I use Korean] a little bit more with my mom now. We have like mini conversations but nothing like, too serious.” Emma shared that after taking Korean classes, she uses Korean more on a daily basis, either when she texts her friends and family. However, she added “...in terms of speaking, I think it’s [Korean heritage language classes] actually made me shy away from speaking it more. Just because I can tell that I’m making mistakes. And I get a little more nervous.”

Many of the participants mentioned that other than using Korean with family, the only time that they have opportunities to use it was at Korean restaurants ordering Korean food. It may be helpful to investigate the maintenance and continuation of Korean heritage language learning of biracial students in longitudinal studies. Korean heritage language programs at universities may need to find strategies to encourage and motivate students to continue to study their heritage language in order to attain a high level of proficiency, even after they have completed the course series or graduate.

**Summary.** Korean heritage language was significant for the participants of this study because it was a channel for communicating with family, a resource to construct their Korean identities, a “door” into the Korean community, and a form of cultural capital to claim legitimacy as an individual of Korean heritage. The ability to communicate in Korean with immediate and extended Korean family members was vital to the biracial individuals in this study. While all Korean parents of the participants were able to speak English or another language shared with their children other than Korean, Korean was still their first language and the language they were most comfortable with. Most extended Korean family members of participants had little or no English proficiency, making Korean one of the necessary elements of communication. Korean proficiency and language skills contributed to a stronger sense of Korean identity and more

confidence for participants. As stated by many participants, Korean language proficiency directly relates to authenticity and acceptance from the Korean community.

Participants in this study either chose to learn Korean at the university because the public education system did not offer it, or because their prior learning at Korean heritage language schools were not as efficient as they had hoped. All participants had a choice (often a requirement for graduation) to learn a foreign language in high school, but the Korean language was not an option. Korean heritage language classes were also not welcoming to racially diverse students, had too wide of a spectrum in terms of language learners' Korean proficiency, and there was a cultural mismatch between teachers and students. Although participants showed interest and desire to continue maintaining and developing Korean heritage language after their Korean heritage language learning experiences at the university, most of them did not continue doing so after they completed their academic Korean heritage language courses at the university.

### **Theme 6: The University as an Important Time and Space for Identity Exploration**

Biracial Korean American students' identities change over time. Although biracial Korean Americans did not necessarily develop their identities according to a linear stage model, their experiences were similar in the sense that how they perceived their identities and how they identified themselves changed significantly before attending the university versus at the university. Almost all of the participants mentioned that their views on their biracial identity changed since entering the university.

**Prior to entering the university.** Before attending the university, up until high school, many participants shared they had conflicting perceptions of their biracial identities and felt challenged by others of their race. This was because they themselves started questioning who they were, but others their age were as well. Tatum (1997) explains that it is often in junior high

school that identity processes begin to unfold. During middle school and junior high school, environmental cues may trigger an examination of racial identity (Tatum, 1997). Betty wrote, “Middle school was a disgusting time; everyone was going through puberty and was trying to understand the changes that were happening both physically and mentally, that I’m sure everyone was a bit messed up in the head.” Adolescence brings awareness, and awareness brings cognitive and emotional discomfort around issues of race and mistreatment (Cross, 1991; 1995). Students in junior high or high school often have what Cross (1995) may characterize as immersion/emersion: students feel a strong desire to surround themselves with symbols of one’s racial identity and actively seek out opportunities to learn about their own history and culture with the support of same-race peers (Cross, 1991; 1995). Betty talked about how students at her middle school would “hang out in their groups” and some of the peers were quick to judge others based on her racial background and looks:

One of the school librarians was hosting an Asian lunch for each grade in each community. She was gathering the Asian students to meet during our lunch period and talk about any experiences and discrimination they faced for simply being Asian. I first heard of this lunch from my Korean friend; she got the invite, but was wondering why I didn’t receive one as well, so she talked to the librarian on my behalf. It turns out that I didn’t attend the first meeting because my teacher forgot to give me my invitation. I did attend the second meeting and so I went with my friend. When I was there, I came across a Chinese girl I went to elementary school with. I remember she was a very nice person in elementary school, but as soon as we started middle school, she changed. She completely changed her appearance and became a bit more judgmental of others. When she saw me at the lunch, she approached me and straight up told me that I shouldn’t be

here because I'm not Asian enough, in which my friend defended me saying that I'm half Korean. She then retorted that being half doesn't count. I think in all my life, that was the first time I was ever discriminated against for being half Korean.

Rockquemore (1998) problematized how others try to question the ambiguous appearance of biracial individuals or challenge biracial individuals' sense of self by asking the 'what are you?' question, "Others may approach the question of the biracial individual's racial background to clarify a discrepancy between the appearance and the professed identity...there can either be a renegotiation of the identity, or an interactional rupture can take place in which no shared meaning can be agreed upon" (Rockquemore, 1998, p. 206). For Amy, it was in high school when she started questioning her identity in high school because of outside pressure:

Race or racial issues - because it was a part of my life. Just because I have a Korean mother. And a very White father with an Irish accent because he's from Ireland. And so, a lot of half-Asians, not knowing where they stand, and especially in... In middle school, whatever. I wasn't aware of what was going on. In kindergarten and elementary school, I didn't care...What I felt in high school, especially when people are seeking, the real kind of question really starts to begin. 'Where do I stand in this?'...And so like, 'What am I?...when I was in high school, when I was really searching, wanting an answer, and wanting a place to belong, that was when it was the most confusing. Like I want to be Korean, but the Koreans don't accept me. I want to be White, but the White people don't accept me.

For many biracial individuals, middle school and high school seemed to be a time when their peers were conscious about themselves and others. This self-consciousness and others-consciousness led the participants in this study to be easily influenced by what others said during

their teenage years. Robert talked about an experience he had before entering the university that no longer affects him, but at the time challenged his identity:

In high school, someone had accused me of lying about my racial identity for attention. I never spoke to this person directly, but it was from someone I know who is good friends with this person and someone I've known for a long time so I trust what she says a lot. Anyway, that person had claimed that I wasn't Korean. And I realized... other than my mom being Korean, I might as well have not been Korean at all. I don't speak any Korean, I didn't spend much time with my grandparents, I didn't have any Korean friends, I have never even gone to Korea. It hurt my feelings that someone else was trying to define who I am but in a negative way that just made me feel bad about myself. It made me realize that I look black, and that's just how I will be perceived most of the time, even if there's Korean blood flowing through me.

Schools and institutions of primary education are smaller in size, have a smaller student population, and are less diverse than most four-year universities. Also, up until high school, students usually “hang out in cliques” and are “immature” compared to university students. Emma shared that she “found interest in being Korean all the way up to high school”, but when she was in high school, “there were a lot more Koreans being like, ‘Hey, you're like only half of us’ or they like, kind of pushed it down.” This led Emma to a “realization point” where she had to “accept both sides” because the outward challenges “really clashed” with whom she identified.

**At the university.** The university was a space where participants felt like they didn't “have to walk around with a huge group of friends or look a certain way.” It was also a safe place where they learned that “everyone has their own beauty and everyone has their own interest.” As university students, they felt like they had matured, and the people they encountered were “older

and mature” as well. Emma said, “After entering the university, being biracial didn’t really seem like a big deal anymore.” Betty wrote:

Coming to college has definitely refined my view of myself. In my younger and immature days, I felt like I was conflicted in how I perceived myself as Korean or White. Now, I realize that I am just me. I am what God made me to be and I embrace it. When people ask what my ethnicity is, I always first respond with mixed, and then I tell them specifically. Studying Korean at UW has allowed me to become more connected with the Korean culture and it also allowed me to meet many other biracial Koreans. I feel like I have been given many opportunities to embrace my Korean side in college. I have had many Korean language partners and they have all treated me like a Korean and so I feel as though I was able to embrace my Korean side more than I had in the past. Overall, I am content with myself and I am excited to see what the future brings to this biracial Korean American.

As noted by Betty, one of the reasons that the university was a place of identity awakening for the participants was because they were exposed to people from various racial, ethnic, cultural backgrounds, and walks of life. The increased presence of “international students” also contributed to the many more identity options for the participants. Taking Korean language classes at the university provided a foundation for participants to explore more of their Korean identities, allowed them to become more connected with Korean culture, and meet other biracial Koreans.

Another factor that encouraged participants to become more independent as an adult and actively search for their identities was the transition from living at home prior to attending the university and living away from family during university. All participants had lived with their

immediate/extended families prior to attending the university; during their university years, eight participants decided to live either on-campus or off-campus (i.e. dormitories, greek houses, shared houses, living with partners, etc.), even though many of the participants' families lived in the Seattle area. Only three participants decided to live with their immediate families at home while attending university. Therefore, most participants had less regular communication and interaction with their families after entering the university. Most participants acknowledged the degree of separation from family after entering the university. This kind of setting at the university provided an environment for participants to understand that identities can be situational depending on the context.

Participants also mentioned that as the university students, they have a position of maturity – both cognitive and emotional – that was not expected in their adolescent years. Noah talked about being more comfortable with who he is now. Since becoming a the university student and entering a level of more maturity, Noah stated, “I love being both. I accept being both now. I’m no longer confused about why I am Korean. I’m at peace with my life.” For younger biracial individuals, they have “got to mature to understand it...once you’re older, you realize, ‘This is me. This is what I can and can’t do. This is what I like and don’t like to do.’” He talked about how when biracial individuals are younger, it’s easier to be influenced by what other people say because you “take that more to heart when you're younger” but as you mature and “when you’re older, you just don’t care anymore.” Mason also reported that as time passed by, he accepted being more “special” as he came to “cherish both identities” of being Japanese and Korean and now he has a lot of pride for his heritages.

**Summary.** Racial and ethnic identities change across time. In navigating one’s individual and social identities, identities may emerge, develop, transform, alter, and shift in salience over

time. All participants in this study acknowledged that their identities transformed over time and continued to change, even though those changes and transformations may not have been drastic. All participants of this study recognized that the university was an important time and setting that influenced their identities. The transition to the university, which encompassed factors including developmental age, maturity, changes in living arrangements, economic independence, and social/situational context affected participants' identity construction and attitudes towards their identities.

In terms of experiences before attending the university, participants discussed adolescence as being a stage of life when their identities were heavily influenced by others. Many participants discussed how they went through many changes, including physical, emotional, developmental, and social growth during their teenage years, which led them to feel “confused”, “perplexed”, “hurt”, and “not enough.” Prior to attending the university, especially during junior high and high school, participants in this study often felt frustrated because most of their friends and peers developed “cliques” with people that were similar to them or shared common traits, especially based on race or ethnicity. Given the limited number of students and diversity within their schools, participants struggled to find a group in which they felt like they completely belonged. Many participants also mentioned that they did not have much of a “social life” outside of the school setting when in junior high and high school, as most of their other connections were through their families. Meanwhile, most of the participants mentioned that the university was an important time and space for their identities to be constructed and reconstructed. All participants mentioned that when they entered the university they were more mature on a personal basis, as well as the people they met at the university. The diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds,

variety of ages, and life experiences of peers at the university influenced them, as well as living independently from their immediate/extended families.

### **Theme 7: Identities are Fluid and Context-dependent**

Scholars such as Renn (2000, 2003, 2004, 2008), Rockquemore and colleagues (2009), and Root (1990, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2003) – who took ecological approach in examining mixed race individuals – contend that people have situational identities, depending on the context of different microsystems. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) provided a complex model of multiple dimensions of identity that focused on meaning making specific to the context that influenced identity development. In other words, depending on the context, people may respond differently as one or more identities surface in that particular situation.

**Physical spaces and identities.** Many participants explained that the geographical context and demographic composition can determine how they viewed themselves. Three of the participants lived in Hawaii for many years throughout the course of their lives and they discussed that because of the demographic makeup of Hawaii they were part of the majority there. The three participants who had experience living in Hawaii felt that Seattle was a different context in terms of their racial consciousness. Compared to Hawaii, they stated that Seattle was not as diverse and did not have a large mixed race population. The geographical setting made them recognize and become more aware of their race as they “noticed that it was a rarity to be a mixed Korean [in Seattle].” Caden stated, “I didn’t think about my mixed race because there are a lot of mixed Asian people” and that “Caucasians are the minority there [in Hawaii].” Caden also said that while people in Hawaii associate themselves culturally, people in Seattle associated themselves more geographically. He explained that in Hawaii, it was important to specify your heritage, whereas in Seattle, it was important to specify the general area where you were from:

I would never say I was Hawaiian. Cus I would say I'm Korean or Korean Japanese [in Hawaii]. Here you'd say, "I'm Washingtonian, or Pacific Northwesterner." So I think everyone there [in Hawaii] sticks to - they feel strongly about their culture. And they would be kind of offended if you say anyone who lives there is Hawaiian. Yeah, cus there's that indigenous part.

Caden suggested that because a large percentage of people in Hawaii are mixed, it was more important to specify "how" you were mixed (i.e. Korean, Korean-Japanese). In Seattle, however, people would be more interested in knowing "Where are you [really] from?", requesting specific countries or nationalities that indicate certain racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Zoe, who grew up in Japan and moved to the U.S. when she was eight, seems to echo the opinions of other biracial individuals in that the geographical and demographic composition was important to their identification. Zoe was a part of the on-campus Japanese student organization and revealed that she would emphasize that she was *Japanese American* because everyone at the student organization was of Japanese heritage. On the other hand, in Japan, she would consider herself *Japanese American*. Zoe explained, "They [Japanese people] don't think I can speak English. They keep talking to me in Japanese. They don't assume that I'm American. Which is why I don't fit in completely in Japan." She added, "But everywhere else, I would express myself as Japanese Korean American."

**Online spaces and online identities.** The online society has become one of the spaces where people may find community that help them build and rebuild identities. In fact, some Internet sites are "designed with specific ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, political, or other identity-driven categories in mind" (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 214). Robert, who enjoys playing online videogames for a hobby, stated that when he encounters online "friends," social constructs

such as race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, and religion rarely are a concern for him and others. He said that most of his online friends did not know that he was half-Black until he told them. Robert laughed as he recalled when he was talking through a microphone with an online friend while playing a game and his friend said, “Oh, I had no idea. You sound really White.” Robert also said that most of his online friends are native English speakers, with a few Koreans, but “they don’t really talk that much.”

Among the various online communities, the computer gaming society is a major one. According to Cohen (2001), the process of identification involves the merging of self and other, and repetitive internalization of alternative identities of media characters. In other words, the gaming community – as opposed to offline physical spaces – serves as a space where players create, maintain, clarify, or modify identities. Since you “can’t really see anyone,” their profiles are the only thing you can see; but even people’s profiles only include “an online name and then biography if they want to write something.” Robert stated that he didn’t feel judged by online video gamers and said, “I feel like when I’m playing video games with someone, everyone’s there just to play games and have a good time.” Two other study participants – both biracial Korean and White female students – commented that they got involved in the gaming society while they were searching for identity options and were “confused” about their identities. Although both are not “hardcore” video game players, they both mentioned that it was a hobby they enjoyed even at the university.

Video gaming and online gaming has been known to be a gendered phenomenon, with more males than female players (Griffiths & Hunt, 1995; Lucas & Sherry, 2004; Phillips et al., 1995; Whitley, 1997). Robert talked about how there are “definitely more males than females in

the gaming community” and “probably 90% of the people I play with are all males.” Robert stated that online people can also cross gender lines easier, choosing to be of another gender:

And then, even online, in games like Maple Story, some girls would make male character so that no one will ever assume that they're a girl...and then I have friends that are guys that pretend to be girls and they get money from other guys that don't actually know So it's like, it's really weird.

According to Robert, it may be an advantage for female players to take a male character because they would be less judged or won't receive “really inappropriate messages.” Also, they would be less of a target for “attack” because sometimes gamers would “completely humiliate someone” with inappropriate comments such as “Oh my god, you just got raped.”

Another online space where participants drew support from and gained resources in building their identities were online communities, forums, and web pages. Betty mentioned that she was a member of a Facebook group for biracial Koreans, and a group for mixed Americans. She described the Facebook group for biracial Koreans as a safe space to share experiences biracial individuals had.

I'm part of a half-Korean group. And so there's a lot of people from all over the place. Especially from America. And it's been suddenly becoming more active and I've started to read people's posts. And so they, a lot of them post their experiences and stuff. Like growing up being half-Korean...I think it's just like a community since there's so many Korean community or Japanese community or whatever, but there's not really a community for mixed people. So we always just gather around and talk.

Betty mentioned that through the online groups, people would share their deepest hurts and challenges, receive consolation and comfort, as well as empowering each other:

I'm kind of surprised because some of the problems they've [other biracial Koreans on the Facebook group] had - I've never had those kind of problems when I was growing up. Like some people tell me, they say to the group, that when they're in Korea, there's prejudiced people out there that would tell their parents like "Your child's a mutt" or something or dirty, but I've actually never had that problem. So I was shocked to hear that. Cus also, - I can't remember.

Betty was also part of an online community that was for biracial Americans in general:

But there's another group I'm a part of - it's the mixed *happa* group - and that's mixed anything. But I think there's more mixed Japanese people in that group...Happa is a Hawaiian word that means "half" or "mixed blood". So it kind of sticks with people. So if someone's happa, that means they're saying they're half. The original Hawaiian term means just mixed blood, but today it's mostly related to being mixed with Asian. So usually if you see someone that's half-White and half-Black, people wouldn't technically associate them with happa even though they are.

Participants mentioned that online resources and websites have increasingly been a space to bring biracial individuals from all races and ethnic groups together. The online spaces and lieu of websites that celebrate and support multiracial families and multiracial issues serves as a space where mixed race individuals can not only express their opinions and share their experiences, but also support and empower each other.

**Identities by the people you surround yourself with.** The people that the participants were with were also a context factor that heavily influenced how they identified themselves. Emma explained that her identity "changes over time depending on who I hang out with more and what not." She added that sometimes she would "change how I act or perceive myself

depending on what group I hang out with.” As a half-Black half-Korean, Robert seemed to feel like his Blackness and Koreanness surfaced depending on who he met, especially when he was trying to make friends of a different gender:

It made me realize that, well, I’m really different from almost everyone else that I know. I don’t really know many people that have the same life experiences that I do, especially with the way that my culture is mixed. But I felt very proud of myself and my racial identity. I feel like I can try to meet Korean girls or friends if I try really hard. But it seems difficult to connect with Black girls – don’t ask me why! It just is. Normally whenever I try to make friends that are girls, I feel like I’m too Black, or too Korean. It’s always the strangest feeling.

Betty shared a similar thought to her situational identity:

I think it depends on who I’m talking to. Or who I’m associating myself with. Cus sometimes people, my non-Asian friends would say I’m Asian when I don’t understand what I’m doing. And then the Korean side...well, they don’t really say, “You’re so White” but I feel like usually my close friends, they’d treat me as Asian also. But it’s kind of hard.

Depending on the context and environment, biracial individuals in this study often assumed a situational identity. Noah talked about being identified differently based on the racial composition of friendship networks and how he was confused in his racial identity in various situations:

Early in high school, I had more White friends. And cus I did cross-country in high school, and I met all my friends there. And they’re all White people, pretty much...They [My White friends] would always say I was the only Asian on the team and stuff. And I thought it was funny. I didn’t have a big deal with it. But I felt more Asian with them.

Cus they were full-American...I was either too American for Koreans, or too Korean for Americans. So it was weird feeling two different races at different times.

For others, their many identities surfaced when they were asked where they were from and what ethnicity they were. Oftentimes, people would ask with one race or ethnicity in mind, and when participants answered with two different racial/ethnic groups, it was hard for them to accept. Josh illustrates this experience:

My response is definitely different. “Oh, I’m half-Korean, half-Chinese” and then most people don’t expect an answer of half-half. They expect, “Oh, I’m Japanese, Korean, or Chinese.” So when they think of...I don’t think that they look at it negatively, but they’re kind of surprised.

As Rockquemore and colleagues (2009) indicate, biracial identities are discussed within the context of existing racial languages and categories. This suggests why being of one or more racial or ethnic groups may be puzzling. Robert shared an experience where he was asked which category he related to more, when in fact, multiple identities were present in that particular situation:

Like when someone asks me, “Where are you from? What ethnicity are you?”, I’m like, “I’m half-Black, half-Korean.” And then another question I get that’s really common is like, “You’re half of both, but what do you consider yourself as?” and that’s like, I mean, I consider myself as both!

Fraternity houses also came up as a context of people that influenced participants’ identity development. Caden had lived in the dormitories on campus during his freshman year but moved to a fraternity house in his sophomore year. Although many Greek organizations are based on gender and race, the fraternity house that Caden had joined was not a White fraternity,

but a mixed one. He stated that “the dorms are extremely excluded [from mingling with others from different racial groups]” while “[Greek] houses are extremely not excluded,” adding that the reason he chose to join a mixed fraternity was because he didn’t want to be “enclosed.”

Caden also commented that his Greek “brothers” helped him feel a sense of belonging as well as helped with his academic achievement. While sharing how his life at the university has changed since joining the fraternity, he explained, “I felt like it [the fraternity] really helps. A lot of guys help you out. And help you study.”

The students in the study felt that one or more of their identities were dominant in certain situations and settings. Depending on who they were with, where they were, or what situation they were in, different identities surfaced; they were in a place where they had embraced their multiple identities.

**Summary.** The participants in this study perceived the social and situational context as essential to understanding how their identities have transformed over time, but also across space. The participants shared how they coped and chose to act in situational contexts of different geographical settings, racial compositions, and people. Most participants discussed how they would identify with one race, more than one race, no races, or mixed race identities depending on the situation because the situation would “draw out” or “bring out” one or more of their identities. Two participants who had experiences living abroad talked about how different countries and the demographic makeup gave them opportunities to experience situational labeling and different choices in affiliation compared to when they were in the United States. Three participants who had experiences living in Hawaii mentioned how Hawaii and Seattle were not only different in terms of physical place, but also in terms of the social barriers that were used to encourage or discourage biracial individuals to affiliate and belong with certain

racial and social groups. Another aspect of ecology the participants mentioned was the people they were interacting with. In other words, the ecology of different places including the environment, racial dynamics, interactions with people, and attitudes and perceptions towards the mixed race population all led to participants identifying differently in varying contexts.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This study focuses on biracial Korean American university students and their identity development, specifically to understand: (a) how individuals feel about being biracial Korean American; (b) what biracial Korean Americans consider as important to their identity construction and the factors that influence biracial Korean identity; (c) how biracial Korean Americans negotiate and “dance” with multiple identities; and (d) why biracial Korean Americans decide to learn Korean heritage language, especially in higher education. To accomplish this purpose, data were collected from 11 biracial Korean American university students who met the following criteria: (1) first generation of being biracial; (2) parents with two different racial/ethnic heritages (one of the parents was born and/or grew up in Korea and the other parent was born and grew up in the United States; (3) second generation American citizen; and (4) taken or is taking Korean language classes at the university (higher education setting). The following discussion is based on the findings of the study presented in previous chapters. Particular emphasis will be given to the recommendations provided by the study participants.

### Summary of the Findings

One of the main concepts of the conceptual framework for this study was *Biracial Korean American Identities*. The assumption was that the identities of biracial Korean Americans are multifaceted, and while each individual may have a different set of identities, there was a facet of identity that biracial Korean Americans shared. Findings confirmed that there was a shared facet of identity, namely *Biracial Korean American identities*, which the participants experienced in common. This was not a static, fixed, singular form of identity, but

rather a space of identities that were formed in a culmination of various experiences that were similarly shared among subjects in which they made meaning and understood as biracial Korean Americans.

The second main concept of this study was *Identity development/construction*. This concept showed how biracial Korean Americans constructed their identities prior to entering the university through the interacting with factors such as immigration history, gender, family, sexual orientation, among others. Although not all participants addressed the same factors that influenced the identity development process, there were factors that were common for all participants. These factors emerged as the first five themes of the findings. The findings from each major theme showed that the family, friendship groups, the Korean community, physical appearance, and Korean heritage language were important factors participants shared as essential to their identity development.

Results of the Family Matters theme show that parents (both the Korean and non-Korean parent), siblings, and extended family play an important role in the construction of biracial Korean American identities. Participants reported how their Korean mothers played an essential role in encouraging them to explore their Korean heritage. Most participants also recalled either non-Korean parent to have also helped them understand not only their non-Korean roots but also their Korean background. The siblings (both “full” siblings and half-siblings) reportedly helped participants be open to many identity options. Relationships and contact with extended family reportedly helped subjects feel connected with both their Korean and non-Korean heritage.

Within the Whose Crew are You? theme, it was found that participant friendship groups played an influential role in their identity constructions. When discussing peer and friendship groups, participants classified peers and friends in racial and ethnic groups: White, Filipino,

Japanese, Mexican, Black, mixed-race and Korean. Within the Korean peer group category, participants reported that although they may have had Korean friends in the past, they did not have Korean friends after entering the university. Most participants also reported differences among first- and second-generation Korean friends and peers and how in general, they felt excluded or judged when with first-generation Korean peers.

Discovering and Belonging in the Korean Community theme revealed that most participants had experienced a strong sense of community and collective identity in the Korean immigrant communities. Participants who looked mixed or did not speak Korean fluently were reportedly received with mixed reactions by members of the Korean community. Some participants were half-Asian half-Korean were able to pass as Korean members initially, only to be feeling excluded in other ways later. Participants who attended Korean immigrant churches either with their Korean mothers or by themselves reported negative experiences and exclusive responses by the members of the church, which discouraged them to continue attending the church or leave Christianity as a whole.

The Looking the Part to Feel the Part theme revealed that how participants appeared physically, based on skin color, physical features, and appearance determined how they were identified by others and how they identified themselves. Racial identifications and participants' racial identities varied depending on whether they appeared to be monoracial or mixed race. Several half-White half-Korean participants said that their ambiguous looks led to them being treated differently by different groups of people. Some subjects who appeared to be monoracial mentioned that they may pass as Asian, but still faced several hurdles in becoming accepted as an authentic member of the Korean community.

The Korean Heritage Language is a “Door to a Whole ‘nother World” theme began with the Motivations to learn Korean section. The participants reported how their desire to learn Korean was largely due to their wanting to connect with their Korean families. Participants reportedly wanted to learn Korean heritage language to build their identities as well as claim legitimacy in the Korean community. The main reason for taking Korean heritage language classes at the university was because the public school education did not provide opportunities for participants to learn Korean, and Korean heritage language schools that were run by the Korean community were limited in helping them learn. Findings revealed that participants overall felt positive about the heritage Korean language classes they took at the university. Some participants expressed that the courses were demanding and required a lot of time, but still believed that the classes opened opportunities to not only learn the Korean language, but build relationships with the diverse students who were learning Korean as well.

The third main concept of the conceptual framework of this study was *Engagement with identities*. This concept explains how biracial Korean Americans navigate their many identities while in university. These various identities are nestled in various situations in a specific context, namely the racialized university context where students of diverse backgrounds attend, and a local cultural context of Seattle, Washington, where there is a high population of mixed race people. The University as an Important Time and Space for Identity Exploration theme showed how participants’ identities developed over time prior to entering university, but also how participants continually constructed and reconstructed their identities during university. Findings revealed that the university was an important time of participants’ lives in exploring and negotiating different identities. In addition, the university was also a specific space in which participants continued to engage with their different identities. Particularly, participants shared

numerous situations within the university context in which their different identities would emerge or disappear. For many participants, the university was the time and space in which they felt more comfortable about whom they were and embraced their context-specific and situation-dependent identities.

Context was an important element to the conceptual framework of this study and how the narratives and identities of participants were understood. Identities are Fluid and Context-dependent revealed the importance of the various contexts and situations that influenced participants to express their identities in one way or another. Participants shared that the geographical context and demographic makeup of where they were determined how they identified themselves, or at least how they expressed their identities. For others, the online space was an important context in which they drew upon to build/rebuild their identities, or use as an outlet to express their non-conventional identities. In addition to physical and online spaces, participants shared that the people they were surrounded was important context which drew out different sides of their identities.

### **Interpretation of the Results**

This goals of this study were to: (1) explore how individuals feel about being biracial Korean American; (2) investigate what biracial Korean Americans consider as important to their identity construction and the factors that influence biracial Korean identity; (3) uncover how biracial Korean Americans negotiate and “dance” with multiple identities; and (4) understand why biracial Korean Americans decide to learn Korean heritage language, especially at the university level. The seven themes that emerged point to the relationships between biracial

Korean American identity and how it relates to identity construction and engagement with identities, as depicted in Figure 1.

One of the research questions of this study was how biracial Korean Americans feel about being biracial, and the majority of the participants were able to describe their identity journeys and narratives to express how they felt being biracial Korean American. All participants of the study felt comfortable not only expressing their identities, but were confident and secure of where they were in terms of their identity journeys. While most participants expressed they were now happy to be of both worlds and did not feel pressured to choose any one identity over another, they shared that their identity construction and development is still an ongoing process. The findings affirm previous findings (Renn, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2008; Root, 2003, 2008; Rockquemore, et al., 2009) that biracial identity development is fluid and changes over time and even from one situation to another.

Although the participants in this study all self-identified as biracial Korean Americans, there was one participant in the study that identified as biracial Korean American, but whose narrative I did not include in analysis. Purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Among the various purposeful sampling strategies, I employed criterion sampling to enlist volunteers that possessed knowledge and experience with the “phenomenon” of being biracial Korean American, and specifically the aspect of Korean heritage language learning in relation to their identity development process. Participants selected using criterion sampling would be able to “provide information that is both detailed (depth) and generalizable (breadth)” (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 539). According to Patton (2002), “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich

cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance of the purpose of the inquiry ,thus the term purposeful sampling” (p.230). Participants were selected based on four criteria, three of which related to how I defined ‘biracial Korean American’ in this study: first generation of being biracial; parents with two different racial/ethnic heritages (one of the parents was born and/or grew up in Korea and the other parent was born and grew up in the United States; and second generation American citizen. My inquiries to identify participants asked for biracial Korean American university students who not only were willing to share their life experiences, but also identified with a biracial or multiracial identity.

The one participant I interviewed, whom I was not able to include in the data analysis, identified himself as ‘biracial Korean’, but did not meet two criteria (being first generation of being biracial, and having parents with two different racial heritages) of my criterion sampling. As Palinkas et al. (2015) point out, this may be one of the limitations of criterion sampling, “By selecting only individuals who meet a specific criterion defined on the basis of their role in the implementation process or who have a specific experience...one may fail to capture the experiences or activities of other groups playing other roles in the process” (p. 539).

Dominic was a “unique sample” because he has “unique, atypical, perhaps rare attributes or occurrences of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 2009, p. 78). He was 22 years old, gifted in various languages including Latin and Korean (he learned Latin for seven years prior to attending the university, and Korean at the university). Dominic’s parents were both biracial; his father was of multiple heritages, and his mother was half-Korean half-White. Dominic’s maternal grandfather was of French heritage and his maternal grandmother was Korean. Dominic’s mother grew up with her own grandmother until she was six, and after that lived in an orphanage for four years before being adopted and moving to the United States at the age of 14.

Unlike all the other participants in this study, Dominic's mother did not immigrate to the United States by choice or with her family; she moved to the United States because she was adopted.

Throughout the interview, Dominic talked about many of the themes that emerged from this study. In terms of family, Dominic brought up the importance of religion for his parents. Dominic's father was Mormon, and since meeting his father, his mother became a part at Mormon religion and lifestyle. While Dominic attended the Mormon church until he was 14 years old, he stopped going to church altogether due to "personal and intellectual reasons" after that. He also stated that he identified more as Asian prior to attending the university because he attended a private school and he had a lot of Asian friends. Meanwhile, after entering the university, he moved to "having half Asian friends to having zero Asian friends" because most of his friends were rowers or former rowers. Regarding being biracial Korean American, Dominic explained that other than the "blood requirement", being biracial is "finding a balance" and learning "what is authentic to yourself." Dominic discussed about how he felt an internal pressure to learn about his Korean heritage, thus going to Korea on a trip and learning the Korean language. He continued that biracial individuals "bridge both worlds" and "incorporate both cultures to varying degrees", but to him "there is no right or wrong answer to that" but to "find a balance that works for you."

My interview with Dominic made me aware of two important aspects of my research. First of all, it made me cognizant of my positionality and power as a researcher. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) writes, "the potential position of power [I had] as [a] researcher as a result of my social identit[y]" (p. 108). In purposefully sampling, I was also setting boundaries of race-based classifications; defining who was 'biracial Korean American.' The second aspect of my research that Dominic's interview highlighted was the fact that race is, in fact, a social construct.

Although in my study, I used 'biracial' interchangeably with multiracial, mixed race, half-White half-Korean, this itself entails the assumption that there are distinct, monoracial "races."

Dominic identifies himself as 'biracial' problematizes existing definitions of race and racial identity. The case of Dominic and the experiences he described are reminders that not only is race a social construct but the commonly used concept of 'biracial' and 'multiracial' these days are also social constructs. As Rockquemore, et al. (2009) state, "instead of creating 'multiracial' as a subset of the already problematic construct 'race,' we need to test, expand, and refine theories that explain the current reality of race relations (p.25).

The various factors that influenced biracial Korean American identity that emerged in the participant's narratives appeared to parallel existing literature on the different factors that influence biracial identity development. This present study reveals that there are several factors that played an important role in the construction of biracial Korean American identity including: family; friendship groups; physical appearance; Korean community; Korean language; the context of the university; and various situations and contexts. These findings seemed to match empirical support for literature on biracial identity that suggest that family (Herman, 2004), phenotype and physical appearance (Khanna, 2004), peer groups (Standen, 1996), racial acceptance (Xie & Goyette, 1996) and language are important in biracial identity construction (Cho, 1997, 2000; Cho & Krashen 1994, 1996, 1998; Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; Feuerverger 1986, 1991; He, 2010; He & Xiao, 2008; Tse, 1998).

A number of categories of analysis identified in this study parallel some of the concepts in the body of literature that examines the interplay between family context and one's racial and ethnic identities (Marshall, 1995). In particular, this study supported studies that found that family plays a crucial role in how Korean American individuals' shape their ethnic identities.

Family was a significant factor in the formation of identity for participants in this study. Most of the participants in this study reported that their parents (both Korean and non-Korean parent) played an influential role in their identity development. Many participants discussed the importance of their parents' marital stability, relationship, and the interaction between the parents and how that affected their identity options. In other words, interracial marriages and marital stability affect biracial children and mixed race families.

Recent focus of research has been the increasing divorce rate of interracial marriages, whereas previous research focused on the increasing number of interracial marriages in the U.S. According to the Pew Research Center (2012), approximately 15 percent of all new marriages in the United States in 2010 were between spouses of a different race or ethnicity. Bratter and King (2008) described how literature on interracial families rarely examines on whether crossing racial boundaries increase the risk of divorce. The findings of their study indicate interracial couples that have a higher rate of divorce than same-race couples, especially White female and non-White male couples. Kreider (2000) also found that interracial couples were approximately 50 percent chance more likely to divorce than endogamous couples, but that being in an interracial marriage was less important than many other characteristics that predict an increased risk of divorce. There were four participants who reported that their parents divorced: one participant had a Korean mother and White father; one participant had a Korean mother and Black father; one participant had a Korean mother and Hong Kongese father; and one participant had a White mother and Korean father. While the participants whose parents had divorced do not necessarily match research regarding patterns of divorce among interracial couples, the four participants shared that it would have been easier for them to explore the different identity options had their parents stayed together and gave them mutual support. Utsunomiya (2011), who studied 271

Japanese university students, found that parental marital commitment influenced identity formation both directly and indirectly through tolerance for family differentiation. Utsunomiya (2011) further suggests that it may be necessary to consider identity development in late adolescence in the context of quality of parental marital commitment.

The study's findings regarding how the Korean mother plays an essential role in her child's ethnic identity development is in agreement with previous research by Chan (1990), and Pak (2006) and Yang (1984). Scholars argue that Korean immigrant women were required to bear and raise children, cook, do the housework for their family and for others, while developing their identity "in lieu of racial and cultural issues, but also having to navigate their identity in the midst of various, often contradictory, gender relations" (Pak, 2006, p. 26). According to Moon (2003), Korean immigrant women were the ones who carried the traditional role of being an obedient wife and nurturing mother, raising and educating the children no matter the situation. All participants with a Korean mother reported that their mother was the most important person that provided a foundation for their Korean identities and motivated them to explore their Korean heritages. However, the two participants with Korean fathers shared that they did not feel supported by their fathers in exploring their Korean heritage. In addition to the role of parents, siblings (including 'full' siblings, who shared the same two biological parents, and 'half' siblings, who shared one biological parent) were identified by the participants to be encouraging and supportive figures in exploring their identity options. Furthermore, extended family such as grandparents, uncles and aunts and cousins influenced participants.

Friendship groups also influenced participants. Participants had a diverse group of friends from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Most participants explained their friendship groups using racial/ethnic categories (i.e. White, Black, Filipino, mixed, Japanese, etc.). According to

most participants, the racial and ethnic backgrounds of their friendship groups mattered because it often related to the acceptance and friendship of their friends. While many participants had Korean friends growing up and prior to attending the university, after entering the university, none of the participants reported to have close friends who were Korean or Korean American.

Root (1996) suggests that as children, biracial individuals become aware of race as a social construct and that they are different from their single race friends from a very young age. Race consciousness is “brought up directly, sideways, and from all sides for people of mixed heritage” (Root, 2003). Most participants in this study seemed to be race conscious (or ethnicity conscious) of others, especially their friendship groups. One participant, Hunter stated, “I don’t think about race that much”, but when explaining his peer group, he described the specific racial and ethnic composition of his friendship group. In the “American style” of a monoracial system, which is “one race per person” (Root, 1996b, p.1), biracial individuals may feel as if they need to be accepted in one group or another. Therefore, their choice of friends of one group or another may be interpreted as “selling out” or “not being authentic” (Root, 1996b, p. 2). I observed this with other participants as well. For instance, Zoe talked about how her father’s side of the family was a “racial minority” in Japan because her paternal grandparents were ethnic Korean residents in Japan, who were considered non-mainstream compared to Japanese culture. She explained that after moving to the United States, both her father and mother were a minority in terms of race and culture, and that she had been highly aware of how that had affected her own racial identity.

Most participants stated that their racial identity and Korean identity was an important part of how they identified themselves and that throughout their lives their race and their Korean heritage was a source of confusion, exploration, and empowerment. However, one participant stated that although his biracial background was important to him in his earlier years, it became

less important to him as his sexuality became more of a dominant social construct that affected how he identified himself.

As a half-Korean half-Asian, the participant described that sometimes he felt that he was a “double minority” based on his sexuality and his race, but his sexual orientation was more salient in his overall identity. He talked about how his sexuality affected the choice of which city and neighborhood he now lives, as well as the potential cities and neighborhoods he chooses to pursue his career in in the future. Scholars such as Chen and Tyron (2012) and Eguchi (2011) state that Asian American gay men may experience “dual minority stress” from being a sexual minority and having added disadvantages of racial/ethnic minority status; however, their racial minority stress may not necessarily predict psychological distress. In fact, Chan (1989) found that Asian American lesbians and gay men identified more strongly with their lesbian or gay identities than with their Asian American identities. The participant in my study explained that there were many challenges he went through including a rift with his family, who had “traditional” ways of thinking about gender, sexuality, roles, and responsibilities. He mentioned that because his family was Asian immigrants, there were traditional Asian values, religious beliefs, and ideal views of masculinity that were in conflict with his sexual orientation.

Acceptance and belonging to the Korean community was another factor related to participants’ identity development. All 11 participants reported that they had observed and experienced the exclusiveness of the Korean community; whether it is through Korean neighbors, mutual family friends who were Korean, or at the Korean immigrant church. Many participants’ Korean parents had experienced negative comments from the Korean community, or chose to limit their involvement in the Korean community because of the exclusiveness of Korean immigrants. Scholars (Chong, 1998; Oh, 2007) found that the Korean American church is a place

for the rediscovery of ethnicity and engage in ethnic activities. Chong (1998) stresses the importance of the role of ethnic religion in immigrant communities, and argues that the Korean American churches are the “primary site of the cultural reproduction of the second generation” (p.259). The Korean immigrant church was a space that many participants recognized and experienced to be the hub of the Korean American community, but all participants who had experience attending a Korean immigrant church either chose to attend a different church or leave Christianity.

Many scholars have conceptualized authenticity as “being true to oneself, achieving self-fulfillment, or maintaining ‘commitment to self-values’” (Bendix, 1997; R, Erickson, 1995; Fine, 2003; Taylor, 1992; Trilling, 1972; Warikoo, 2011, p. 47). Authenticity is neither a static nor a fixed concept; it is a social construct and process in which the “the criteria by which authenticity is determined are socially constructed” (Warikoo, 2011, p. 47). Gregg (2012) writes about the social nature of authenticity and argue that it should be an acknowledgement of society towards an individual's identity option, “The politics of authenticity are the politics of self-identification: structure as enabling not confining. Self-identification involves a politics of recognition, of public acknowledgment of one’s choice, the choice of one’s authentic identity (p 146).” Scholars have discussed the racial and ethnic aspects of authenticity (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998; Fine, 2003; Warikoo, 2007) and how it relates to identity formation. In terms of racial and ethnic identities, Cornell and Hartmann (1998) explain that authenticity is a “social convention,” and that the process of authenticity occurs when “Some set of group members or outsiders selects a version of an identity and defines it as ‘authentic,’ granting it a privileged status. They then use it to distinguish among persons and identities, past and present. The grounds of supposed authenticity, however, are essentially arbitrary” (p. 94).

According to the participants in this study, the concept of Korean racial and ethnic authenticity is neither concrete nor fixed. However, participants seemed to have a perception of Korean authenticity that influenced how they identified themselves and how others viewed them. As Cornell and Hartmann (1998) explain, racial and ethnic authenticity is constructed and arbitrary, but nevertheless has real meanings for racial and ethnic groups. As the participants in this study reported, the three Ls - looks, (blood) lineage, and language - seemed to be important factors in determining “authentic” Koreans. Other criteria for determining the degree to which an individual is authentically Korean included eating or cooking Korean food on a regular basis, using Korean media, utilizing certain social networking sites and mobile applications, dressing like a Korean, wearing makeup in a Korean style, and affecting Korean mannerisms. Most participants in this study shared their experiences in different settings in which they felt they had to “prove” their Korean authenticity, or “earn” their way to be accepted.

As many participants in this study explained, the question of Korean authenticity seemed to be more complex for biracial Koreans than for “pure-blood” Korean immigrants. Monoracial Korean immigrants may be judged their “authenticity” because they have a more culturally “American” style of life or lack of fluency in the Korean language. However, the authenticity of biracial Koreans is much more intricate; biracial Koreans may be more “American” in lifestyle, have different variations of Korean fluency and oftentimes do not appear to be “authentically” looking Koreans. In addition, as one of their parents is not of Korean heritage, it complicates the “degree of authenticity” for biracial Koreans. As blood lineage is considered essential to an authentic Korean identity, it seemed like the one-drop rule worked either way for biracial Koreans. While in some instances Koreans accepted biracial Koreans as Korean based on the fact that they had “Korean blood”; the fact that they were not fully Korea was also used against

them to exclude biracial Koreans as they were “hybrid” or “mixed” offspring of a “pure Korean” and “pure-blood” non-Korean.

Another significant factor related to participants’ identity development was physical appearance. Aspects of physical appearance mentioned by participants included skin color, hair color, eye color, and facial features. Other elements of appearance that the participants discussed that were signifiers of their identification were makeup and clothing. All half-White half-Korean participants and the half-Black half-Korean participant reported that physical appearance was critical for determining their identity options; their ambiguous looks limited the option of claiming a single-race identity, especially a Korean identity. Most half-Asian half-Korean participants were not as sensitive to their physical appearance, as they “looked Asian” (belonged to the Asian racial category) and were able to “pass” as Asian. However, in terms of “looking Korean”, most participants observed that to be accepted as Korean, there was more requirements to meet than merely skin color/tone, eye and hair color; there were certain facial features, style of clothing to wear, and mannerisms they felt like they needed to have.

All of the participants in this study reported that physical appearance was important in how others perceived them and how they identified themselves. All five half-White half-Korean participants talked about receiving the “What are you?” question. The “What are you?” question reflects society’s emphasis on race/ethnicity as a marker for knowing how to interact socially. This is because many people gauge conversations with someone based on perceived cultural similarity and difference, and when people can’t categorize someone because of racial/ethnic ambiguity, they may be at loss for how to proceed in their interactions (Bennett, 2015). Thus, “those unaccustomed to diversity may find it distressing to engage in a conversation and attempt to connect with a person who is ambiguous in physical appearance” (Bennett, 2015 p.33). For

biracial Korean and Asian individuals, there were significant physical traits that the participants associated as influencing factors of their development. Six participants specifically discussed the influence of skin color in terms of their biracial identities in the context of both American, Asian, and Korean settings. One participant, Emma, talked about the prevalence of colorism in the Asian community. Giving the example of Filipinos, she explained that Filipinos are often discriminated against within the Asian community because their skin color and complexion are darker than the favored “whiter” and “lighter” Asians. This echoes Rondilla’s (2009) examination of the phenomenon of valuing lighter skin tones in Asia, and how Asian women use skin lighteners to “become a better version of themselves” (p. 65). Emma discussed about how in Asian communities light skin is “kind of a capital” and that the lighter the skin, the more “Western” or “civilized” you are viewed. For this reason, Emma had many Filipino friends, as she noticed that darker skinned Asians, many being Filipinos, were less discriminatory based on skin color.

Skin color seemed to be more a prominent issue in the Korean context for biracial Koreans. All five half-White half-Korean participants said that they were visibly “whiter” than Korean counterparts, which set them apart from most monoracial Koreans. On one hand, the differences in their looks caused Koreans to “Otherize” them. At the same time, the participants mentioned how “half Koreans are stereotyped to be the pretty or cute ones” and they had received many comments about having lighter skin. In fact, Betty recalls that she had several experiences when she was traveling in Korea – or when she encountered Koreans in the United States – they would mention how “milky” and “doll-like” her skin was. Interestingly, only one of the half-Korean half-Asian participants mentioned how colorism operates in the Korean context. Mason, who is half-Korean half-Japanese, talked about how Koreans are “sensitive to lighter skinned people”

and how he is lucky to be mixed Japanese and Korean - two Asian countries with lighter complexions than other Southeast Asian countries. In the Korean and Korean American communities, it is generally the case that the lighter individuals are viewed more positively than darker individuals.

Four participants mentioned how Japan and the Japanese community are more accepting of biracial and mixed race individuals than other Asian cultures. Compared to other Asian countries, participants observed that mixed race individuals are celebrated in the Japanese culture. Emma, whose boyfriend is “full Japanese”, shared how she has been actively involved in the Japanese community since dating her boyfriend. She shared how Japanese people perceive “halfies as cool” and “half babies as cute.” However, while mixed individuals may be more widely accepted in Japan than in other Asian cultures, Japanese people “think mixed White skin babies are prettier than other skin toned ones.” All racial identities, whether monoracial or multiracial, “are inherently ambiguous because race is inherently a suspect category - one that drives its power precisely because of its continuous and consistent mutability” (Ho, 2015, p. 11).

In terms of Korean heritage language, all participants acknowledged that the Korean heritage language was an important element to their identity development. All participants noted that their knowledge and ability to speak Korean helped them understand more about their Korean heritages, strengthened their Korean identity, as well as become more welcomed by Koreans and the Korean community. Previous literature and research have focused on the importance of the Korean language in developing a Korean identity (Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; J. Lee, 2002; You, 2005) and the (in)effectiveness of Korean heritage language schools, however, this study highlights what Korean heritage language means to biracial Koreans and their experiences in heritage Korean language learning in relation to their identities. Most participants

reported that they chose to take Korean heritage language classes at the university because they did not have the opportunity to take Korean in the public school system prior to attending the university, and the Korean heritage language schools they had attended were not as effective because of the student population was not as diverse and the teaching styles of teachers at the school was not very effective. Although much research has focused on Korean heritage language schools (Kondo-Brown & Brown, 2008; Lee, J., 2013), the challenges Korean heritage language teachers face (Lee & Bang, 2010), and Korean parents' involvement in Korean heritage language schools (Brown, C., 2011; J. Kim, 2011), themes that emerged in this study highlight the need for more research in the area of biracial Korean students' experiences in Korean heritage language learning, and the implications this may have for the heritage language schools and programs.

The university was found to be a significant 'ecology' of time and space for the identity of biracial individuals. The literature on psychological identity and social identity development illuminates the findings in Theme Six, *The University as an important time and space for identity exploration*. Developmental psychologists such as Erikson (1968) argue that the search for and development of one's identity is the critical psychosocial tasks of adolescence. According to developmental psychologists, the identity crisis of adolescence is resolving identities that are imposed by family or society, and asserting control and seeking out an identity that brings satisfaction, feelings of industry, and competence. On the other hand, social psychologists Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) focus on feelings of belonging to a group (social identity) and how one's negotiation of one's social identity in the broader context of the value society influences one's group membership. The Social Identity Theory proposes that a person has not one "personal self", but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group

membership. As developmental and social psychological identity theories indicate, the students in this study reported that their identities changed over time – especially their entry into the university. The findings of this study suggests that before attending the university, biracial Korean Americans are highly influenced by outer factors such as peer groups and acceptance from the Korean community; however, the university setting provides a place and time for biracial Korean Americans to gain confidence in their own identities.

This study seem to affirms previous findings (Renn, 2008; Rockquemore, et al., 2009; Root, 2003) of scholars of mixed race identity that mixed race people construct different racial identities based on contextually specific logics. Theme Seven, *It depends on the context*, draws upon recent approaches to biracial identity development that argue that ecological conditions influence identities. Recent scholars have examined biracial identity development through an ecological lens and have viewed biracial and mixed race identities as *situational* (Renn, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2008; Rockquemore, et al., 2009; Root, 1990, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2003). The present study reveals that biracial Korean Americans have a multiple set of identities, and it depends on who they are with and what context and setting that is in that their different identities emerge.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This dissertation was an exploratory study of the identity development of biracial Korean American university students and the role of heritage language learning for biracial Korean students. Particularly, the study aimed to explore the factors that influenced participants to deconstruct and reconstruct their identities, and the interactions between the biracial individuals and various ecological settings surrounding them. In addition, I examined the university as an important context in which biracial Koreans develop their identities, both in terms of time and space. I also explored how biracial Korean American university students' identities were

situational, depending on the context. While this research provided valuable insights into the influences and various factors of identity development of biracial Korean Americans, more research is needed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of this population.

There were various important issues that could not be addressed by the particular sample in this study. First, in my sampling criteria, I did not designate which of the participants' parent was Korean and which was not. However, nine participants in this study had Korean mothers, and only two participants had Korean fathers. Future studies could sample biracial Korean Americans with Korean fathers, to understand better if there is a difference between the influences of the Korean mother compared to a Korean father. Second, I was able to interview students who either had taken or were taking Korean classes at the university level, but not those who were never enrolled or chose not to be enrolled in the Korean classes. Future research on biracial Korean American university students could include those who did not take Korean classes at the university, to get a better understanding about how Korean language affects biracial Korean American identity. Third, this study primarily focused on Korean classes at the university level. The educational level and the university setting of biracial Korean Americans could have affected how biracial Korean Americans perceived and engaged with their identities. Studies on biracial Korean Americans with differing educational backgrounds could broaden research on biracial Korean American identities. Fourth, this study focused on certain aspects of biracial Korean American identity, especially the racial and ethnic identity aspect. Future research could examine other aspects of identity that could be important such as gender identity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, and residential area. Fifth, although the participants in this study discussed their biracial Korean American identities retrospectively,

further studies may take a more longitudinal approach across time, based also on observations of different settings.

Scholars like Berreman (1972) and Nagata (1974) advocate that participant observations are the best research method to observe the various strategies those individuals may use to invoke a particular reference group. Although participant observation was one of my research methods, it was not my main method of investigation, and the number of settings of observation was limited. I observed two biracial Korean American participants, one half-White half-Korean female participant and one half-Asian half-Korean male participant, across different spaces including the Korean heritage language classes, other university courses, and various meetings with participants' friendship groups.

Both participants were recognizably more relaxed and comfortable in a non-academic setting than in an academic one. During the Korean heritage language classes on campus, participants seemed to be most conscious of their surroundings, and passive class participation. The classroom was set in rows with approximately 20 to 25 students, who seemed to be predominantly Asian, with approximately ten appearingly non-Asian students. The class was mostly lecture-style with pair-work with the student sitting adjacent. Both participants were not very verbal during the Korean classes, other than in the exercises required that two people to participate. It was interesting to see the contrast of participants' behavior and body language after the before, during, and after the Korean classes and how they interacted with their peers. Once the Korean class was over, both participants seemed to have let their guards down and actively engaged in chatting with their peers walking out of the classroom. Although participants used Korean mostly during the classes, they were quick to switch to speaking English once the class was over. Both participants seemed to be less tense when taking other classes than the

Korean class. Specifically, the half-Asian half-Korean participant was very active in participating in the discussions in the American ethnic studies class, noticeably more engaged than he was in the Korean language classes. The half-White half-Korean participant seemed less tense, but did not participate actively in the sociology class.

I observed participants in settings with their friendship groups as well. I observed the half-White half-Korean participant with her monoracial Asian boyfriend in a larger friendship group gathering with various racial/ethnic backgrounds, and in a lunch meeting with one of her close friends, who were biracial individuals. I observed the half-Asian half-Korean participant with two of his friends, one White and another Asian American, during a break during his classes. Both of the participants were a lot more engaged during their friendship group interactions than in classes, mostly because the setting was more intimate and they were closer with their friends than peers. Their body language showed they were more relaxed while they were meeting their friends. They seemed more comfortable to verbalizing their opinions and thoughts they had. Both participants used English throughout their interactions with their friendship groups, and seemed to be more engaged in conversation.

The observations helped me to understand the participants in different settings and gave me a glimpse of how biracial individuals navigate their identities situationally. The interviews, written responses, and follow up meetings helped me to understand how biracial individuals navigate their identities in various spaces. However, I was unable to observe participants in their family settings, interacting with family members which are one of the limitations of the observations of this study. Another limitation of the observations was that I was looking at a few snapshots of different situations, rather than a compilation of observations longitudinally. Throughout the observations, I posed questions to myself several times about whether or not

situational identities could be observable and visible. Like code-switching, various identities emerge for biracial individuals depending on the situation, but as a researcher I had selected “situations” to observe that I assumed would reveal differences. The situational identities of participants were a lot more subtle and less visible than I had expected, and it was impossible for me to interpret the verbal or nonverbal languages of participants as one identity or another. As much as different identities may have emerged in different situations, I could not determine how much of a factor the participants’ individual personality traits and the moods and emotions of that particular day were affecting participants’ actions and non-actions. The observation caused me to question if the concept of situational identities were more of a personal/cognitive/psychological/emotional process the individual themselves are aware of rather than behavior that can be observed by a researcher. It also highlighted the complexity of identities; identities are not only situational but are constantly changing, interdependent with various internal and external factors, and often times changing as individuals tell and retell their own narratives.

### **Contributions to the Broader Literature Base and Future Directions in Research**

The foundations of the present studies lie in prior research on ethnic identity and heritage language learning; the importance of heritage language in relation to Korean ethnic identity; Korean ethnic identity and Korean heritage language in higher education; biracial identity development; and Korean American racial identity (Asian American racial identity development; Korean American ethnic identity; Korean racial identity). My research broadens literature in the following areas: (a) biracial identity development; (b) ethnic identity and how it relates to heritage language learning in the higher education setting; and (c) biracial identity development and heritage language learning in higher education. Although there are theories on biracial

identity development, there is a lack of research on biracial and multiracial Asians and their identities. Specifically, there are no studies on the racial identity development of Asian Americans, let alone mixed race Asian Americans. This present study broadens the literature on biracial identity development and contributes to opening dialogue on the identities of biracial Asians Americans, focusing on biracial Korean Americans. This study also expands previous literature on ethnic identity and the role of heritage language - especially Korean ethnic identity and Korean heritage language. While there are many studies on the importance of Korean heritage language and how it influences Korean ethnic identity, there is not much research done on how Korean heritage language learning on the university level and beyond plays a role on ethnic Korean identity. This study provides insight on the role of Korean language on the higher education level and how it interacts with Korean ethnic identity construction. Finally, this study specifically sheds light on how Korean heritage language learning in the higher education setting influences biracial Korean identity.

This study yields insight into role of Korean heritage language programs in higher education institutions. Korean language instructors can use these findings to improve existing Korean language programs to not only focus on language skills, but to help students build cultural and identity foundations. In addition, many of the classifications of heritage and non-heritage classes at the university are based on whether or not the students grew up speaking Korean. For biracial Korean Americans, they may or may not have been exposed to the same amount of Korean language as Korean Americans who may have grown up with both Korean parents speaking Korean. The present study suggests re-examining definitions of what a *heritage learner* may be, and how they are classified. Furthermore, this study challenges the effectiveness of existing Korean heritage language schools on the K-12 level. Most of the Korean heritage

language schools are focused on immigrant Korean children whose parents are first generation Korean Americans who are willing to have their children learn Korean to retain their heritage. However, as the findings of the present study reveal, the Korean heritage language schools may not be effective in their methods and teaching styles of how Korean is taught. The findings of this study also suggest that inclusion and exclusion within the Korean heritage language schools may hinder biracial Korean Americans from learning Korean, and exploring their Korean roots. Some of the biggest problems of Korean heritage language schools include the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the student population, lack of education for students' racial awareness, lack of teacher education for the teachers to teach and engage with Korean students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and a lack of an inclusive educational environment created by the school and staff.

On a broader level, the empowerment of biracial Korean Americans and their identities could be a catalyst to changing the perception of mixed race heritage in the Korean community. Historically, there has been a distinct divide of inclusion and exclusion within the Korean community based on being of Korean *race* (and speaking the Korean language). The experiences of these students could provide insight to the diversity within the Korean community, and help challenge the existing racial hierarchy within the Korean culture. One way the focus of future research in biracial Korean identity development could be broadened by utilizing larger samples to increase *all* mixed Koreans and how they make meaning of their lives, and what implications that has for the Korean American society. The findings may also be useful to Korean parents who have non-Korean spouses, to understand how their mixed race children construct and engage with their multiple identities.

## **Conclusions**

With the changing demographics of the U.S., educators, psychologists, teachers, and counselors will be working with more students who are likely to be of mixed race. According to the Pew Research Center (2012), approximately 15 percent of all new marriages in the United States in 2010 were between spouses of a different race or ethnicity from one another. However, there is little research and theory that follows this rapid change in demographics. In particular, biracial identity development of university students and the university as a significant context for mixed race students has not been explored extensively. Furthermore, research regarding biracial Korean identity development and biracial Korean American university students remains in the investigative stage. The purpose of this study was to explore the biracial identity development of biracial Korean American university students in Korean heritage language classes through an ecological lens.

This study presented a snapshot of the process of biracial Korean American identity development along with various factors that influences the development, construction, and engagement of identities of biracial Korean Americans. Most participants were able to share their stories of how they negotiate and “dance” with multiple identities depending on different situations and contexts. In addition, narratives of the participants revealed what Korean heritage language meant for them, their experiences of learning Korean in the university setting, and how Korean heritage language education in higher education influenced their making meaning of their selves.

This study confirmed and expanded upon findings from previous research on biracial identity development. The various factors that influenced biracial Korean American identity and the situational identity of participants paralleled the various studies and models of biracial and

ethnic identity development. Similar to recent findings, the majority of subjects shared how the university was an important context – in terms of both time and space – in their journeys of identity development. Korean heritage language classes at the university played an important role in the continuous process of participants ‘constructing and reconstructing of a biracial Korean American identity. Acquisition, maintenance, and development of Korean heritage language among biracial Koreans across time need to be explored further.

Lastly, biracial identity development literature has practical implications for Korean heritage language education with a growing mixed race Korean American population. The narratives of biracial Korean Americans may increase the awareness of educators, teachers, and members of the larger Korean American community about the diversity of Korean identities and enhance Korean heritage language education in classrooms at Korean heritage language schools and universities. Narratives of biracial Korean Americans can also help the larger Korean American community recognize current issues regarding the diversity within the Korean American population, provide a context for presenting issues of discrimination or exclusivity within the Korean American community, and encourage social action and change.

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**Appendices**  
Appendix A-1

Email Invitation Letter

College of Education  
University of Washington  
2012 Skagit Lane, Miller Hall Box 353600  
Seattle, WA 98195-3600

Dear [insert name],

I am writing to ask you to take part in a research study – that builds on the work I did with you last year, when, as a part of a class project, I collected data about your biracial Korean American identity. The goal of the new analysis – now treated as a formal research study that has been reviewed and approved by the University’s Institutional Review Board – is to examine how biracial Korean American’s make meaning of their experiences and identity, and why they chose to learn Korean heritage language in higher education. As before, I want to examine more deeply how biracial Korean Americans understand their lives and how their experiences shape their identities.

I am undertaking this new study analysis as a part of doctoral studies at the University of Washington, although I am not a teaching assistant involved with the University of Washington Korean language courses anymore. This study may contribute to improve the Korean language courses at the University of Washington as well as Korean heritage language schools in higher education. In addition, I may use the information from this study to inform my doctoral dissertation.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. All information that I am using in this analysis is confidential. If the results of the study are published or presented, I will not use the names of people, nor any other information that would identify participants. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Washington Human Subjects Division: 206-543-0098 .

Thank you for considering this opportunity. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by phone (206)354-1554 or via email at [amberhk@uw.edu](mailto:amberhk@uw.edu).

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Hyein Amber Kim

Graduate Student  
Curriculum and Instruction  
College of Education  
University of Washington

## Appendix A-2

### Email Recruitment Letter

College of Education  
University of Washington  
2012 Skagit Lane, Miller Hall Box 353600  
Seattle, WA 98195-3600

Dear [insert name],

My name is Hyein Amber Kim and I am a doctoral student from the College of Education at the University of Washington. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about biracial Korean American identity and heritage language learning. You're eligible to be in this study because you identify yourself as a biracial Korean American (your parents are of two different racial/ethnic heritages) and have taken or are taking Korean language classes at the university level.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be part of a 60 to 90 minute interview with the researcher. I would like to audio record your interview with your permission. Also, you will be asked to write a written response about two experiences you have had being biracial Korean American and what those events mean to you. I will use the information to understand better the identity development of biracial Korean Americans.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be part of an observation of biracial Korean American individuals. I would like to audio record parts of the observation with your permission. The observation will include different venues including the Korean heritage language classrooms, other university sources, home, dormitory, student organization events, Korean community events (if possible), and friendship groups. The different venues will be of your choice. I will use the information to understand better the identity development of biracial Korean Americans.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email me or contact me at 206-354-1554.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Hyein Amber Kim

Graduate Student  
Curriculum and Instruction  
College of Education  
University of Washington

## Appendix B

### Consent to Participate in Research Study<sup>1</sup> University of Washington

Biracial Identity Development and Heritage Language Learning

Principal Investigator:

Hyein Amber Kim (College of Education)

amberhk@uw.edu, 206-354-1554

Faculty Advisor

Dr. James A. Banks

jbanks@uw.edu, 206-543-3386

#### **Investigator's Statement**

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you all the information you will need to help you decide whether or not to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study will explore how biracial Korean American university students develop their identity and what Korean heritage language means to biracial Korean Americans. I hope to learn more about how biracial Korean Americans construct their identities, and how do they engage with their identities; what factors influence biracial Korean American identity; and what role the Korean language (especially Korean language course on the higher education level) play in how biracial Korean Americans navigate their identity across cultural borders.

#### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to answer a number of questions about yourself, and about your identity, family, peers groups, language, and cultural background. The interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes and will be conducted on campus or near campus. For example, I will ask you: Can you tell me about your Korean classes? What does being biracial Korean American mean to you? What makes a biracial Korean American?

The interviews will be digitally audio-recorded with your permission upon your consent and the researcher will be the only person to hear the recordings.

You will also be asked to write a written response, in your own time and fashion, on how you make meaning of your identity. I will ask you to describe two salient experiences - one before entering university and one since your arrival - related to being biracial Korean American and to write about what the events mean to you.

If you decide to volunteer for the observations, you will be asked permission to be observed in different

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<sup>1</sup> Consent form Version I (08/20/15)

situations, for the researcher to understand how biracial Korean Americans' different identities surface in various situations. The researcher may observe you across different venues including the Korean heritage language classes, other university courses, home, dormitory, student organization events, Korean community events, and friendship groups.

The observations will be digitally audio-recorded with your permission upon your consent and the researcher will be the only person to hear the recordings.

### **RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT**

Some of the information you share in the study may be personal or uncomfortable to share, in which you have a choice to refuse to disclose such information to the researcher.

### **BENEFITS OF THE STUDY**

There are no direct benefits to the biracial Korean American students; however, many biracial Korean American individuals appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their identity journeys to enrich the Korean community and culture.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information you give will be held confidential. Unique name/number codes will be stored on a password-protected laptop. This file will be destroyed once all data is collected. Thus, all data will become anonymous at the conclusion of the study.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION**

All the data we collect from you will be kept confidential. The data will be retained with coded but linked to identifiers, throughout the study period so we can get back to you to clarify information if necessary, and so that we might ask you about possible future research. The link will be broken in June 15, 2020. Only I as the researcher and my advisor will have access to identifiable data.

Government or university staff sometimes reviews studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

### **OTHER INFORMATION**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You can stop at any time. If the results of this study are published or presented, I will not use your name, or any other identifying information. There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure described above.

I may want to re-contact you for future related studies. Please indicate below whether you give me permission to re-contact you. Giving me permission to re-contact you does not obligate you in any way.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact Hyein Amber Kim at the telephone number or email listed at the top of this form.

---

Signature of investigator

Printed Name

Date

### **Participant's statement**

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later on about the research, I can ask the investigator listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call Dr. James A. Banks at the University of

Washington College of Education 206-543-3386. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_ I give permission for this researcher to audiotape my interview.

\_\_\_\_ I do NOT give my permission for the researcher to audiotape my interview.

\_\_\_\_ I give permission for the researcher to re-contact me to clarify information or for possible future studies.

\_\_\_\_ I do NOT give permission for the researcher to re-contact me to clarify information or for possible future studies.

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C  
Interview Protocol

Date: Time: Location: Interviewer: Interviewee:
<i>Opening statement/brief description of project</i> This study will explore how biracial Korean American university students develop their identity and what Korean heritage language means to biracial Korean Americans. The interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes. Any information you give will be held confidential. Taking part in this study is voluntary. You can stop at any time. If the results of this study are published or presented, I will not use your name, or any other identifying information.
1. I thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.
2. What is university life like at the UW? How do you feel about it?
3. Can you tell me about your Korean classes?
4. What does Korean (heritage) language mean to you?
5. What does being biracial Korean American mean to you?
6. What makes a biracial Korean American?
7. Are there any experiences you've had as a biracial Korean that stand out to you, or that you remember?
<i>Concluding Remarks</i> Let me summarize the information that you shared with me. What do you think? In thinking about our interview, is there anything else that you would like to add?

## Appendix D

### Guideline for Written Responses

Thank you so much for your time sharing your thoughts and experiences with me during the interview. I truly appreciate your valuable time and energy with me.

The following is the guideline for the written response of the research study. In your own time and fashion, please write about two experiences you have had being biracial Korean American. In the written response, describe salient experiences - one before entering the university and one since your arrival - related to being biracial Korean American and what those events mean to you. I will use the information to understand better the identity development of biracial Korean Americans.

Appendix E  
Observation Protocol

Field notes will be recorded during observation in various arenas including Korean heritage language classrooms, other university classrooms, home, dormitory, student organization event(s), Korean community event(s), friendship group(s). The researcher will take field notes on the behavior and activities of the individual at the research site.

Date: Time: Length of activity: Site: Participants:	
How do biracial Korean Americans' different identities surface in various situations?	
<i>Descriptive Notes</i>	<i>Reflective Notes</i>
Physical setting: visual layout	[Reflective comments: questions to self, observations of nonverbal behavior, my interpretations]
Description of participants:  Description of activities:  Description of individuals engaged in activity:  Sequence of activity over time:  Interactions:  Unplanned events:  Participants comments: expressed in quotes:	[Reflective comments: questions to self, observations of nonverbal behavior, my interpretations]
[The researcher's observations of what seems to be occurring]	

**Data record:** These events and activities will be captured in detailed field notes (actual messages in written text, things said by participants, movement and actions, body language, salient happenings during the event time frame, etc.). Individuals will not be identified in the field note record.