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IDENTITY IN SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT:
LIFE STORIES OF KOREAN YOUTH IN NEW YORK CITY

by

HANNAH HYUNKYUNG KIM

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Life Stories of Korean Youth in New York City

by

Hannah Hyunkyung Kim

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

Identity in Sociocultural Context: Life Stories of Korean Youth in New York City

by

Hannah Hyunkyung Kim

Advisor: Professor Deborah L. Vietze, Ph.D.

Despite the increasing number of Korean immigrants and children of Korean parents in the United States, there has been a dearth of research on these youth. The identity of Korean American youth has gained even less attention despite of its developmental importance. This research started from a recognition that the identity of Korean American youth has never been studied through their life stories. Thus, the goal of this research was to understand the identity of Korean youth in New York City through their life stories. I investigated how their life stories developed and what influences affected their identities while growing up as Korean Americans by employing McAdams’ life story model. By doing so, I expected to better understand the meanings of their lives and how they are related to their identity development.

This study employed a qualitative methodology to examine participants’ subjective life experiences in the United States and the development of their identity in the process. I used McAdams’ life story model with its analytic schemes. Ethnographic techniques were also used in interviews and analyses to interpret the participants’ explicit and implicit expressions of Korean-ness. Because the purpose of this study was to explore the identity of Korean American young adults through their life experiences in the United States, ten second-generation Koreans in their
late teens to twenties were recruited for the study. A primary focus was on the development of identity.

To explore the identity of the ten Korean youth I had four overarching research questions:

1. What do individual life stories of Korean youth in New York City tell us about their identity;
2. How do their perceptions of ethnic identity relate to their life stories;
3. What are the meanings of “being a Korean” or “Korean-ness” in their everyday discourses;
4. How do Koreans in the U.S. use societal images of Koreans to describe their life stories and those of Korean friends?

The ten Korean youth interviews generated over 250 pages of transcripts, which were analyzed using the eight coding categories. The eight categories are: (1) theme of agency and communion; (2) two types of identity discourses; (3) neighborhood and cultural adaptation; (4) family relations and experiences; (5) friends, school, and Korean church network; (6) ethnic behaviors and practices; (7) changes in identity perception: Korean or American or both; and (8) prejudices and discrimination.

The study findings revealed that the Korean youth’s awareness of Korean heritage occurred in facing many different life experiences. Parents, family, friends, school, church, and the Korean community in New York were all important contexts for the youth’s realization of their Korean-ness. Images of Koreans specifically and Asians in general influenced their awareness of Korean and Asian identity. The youth confronted racism, which along with American stereotypes and prejudices towards them raised their awareness of Korean and Asian identity. While a few youth perceived their Korean heritage would be hurdles to successful American lives, each realized that they had better embrace their Korean and American sides because their Korean heritage was undeniable.
Although living between Korean and American life may on occasion be tough, the majority of the Korean youth felt comfortable accepting both Korean- and American-ness. They reported having made efforts to choose career paths to enhance their and their families’ lives. The life stories of the Korean youth, indeed, showed who they were and how they have been living in the United States. Thus, the identity of the Korean youth developed as their life stories were being written.
DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In retrospect, the entire process of writing this dissertation was one of my biggest life challenges. It would have been impossible without people giving me their full support in every aspect of my life. Here I would like to express my sincere gratitude.

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I would like to thank my editor, Dr. Robert Sauté, for his assistance. As a native Korean speaker, writing in English has been a big challenge, but working with him made me enjoy the process of writing.

I want to thank the ten Korean young adults who volunteered to participate in this study. They willingly took the time to meet with me and to share their life stories. I greatly appreciate their sincerity and willingness to help me conduct this research. It was a precious and inspiring experience for me.

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Identity in Sociocultural Context: Life Stories of Korean Youth in New York City

Introduction

The goal of this research is to understand the identity of Korean youth in New York City through their life stories. This study attempts to capture how Korean young adults in the sociocultural context of New York City regard the experiences and meanings of their lives, how their life stories reflect their identities as immigrants and minorities in the United States. I provide a theoretical framework in which identity practices can be understood as narratives of their personal life stories. I will examine how their life stories developed and what influences affected their identities while growing up as Korean Americans. By doing so, I expect to better understand the meanings of their lives and how they are related to their identity development.

Background

The Korean population in the United States has rapidly increased over the last decades of the 20th century. The 2010 Census reported over 1.7 million Koreans living in the Unites States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), a more than two-fold increase since the 1990 Census when 800,000 Koreans resided in the United States (Min, 2011). In 2010, the top five states with the largest Korean populations in descending order were: California, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, and Texas. California has the largest Korean population (505,222 or 30% of the total Korean population in the United States). New York (153,609 or 9%) and New Jersey (100,334 or 5.9%). The combined Korean population of these two states is over 250,000 or 15% of the total Korean population in the U.S (Min, 2011).

According to the most recent statistics from the Asian American Federation Census Information Center (2013), over 100,000 Koreans were living in New York City in the year of 2009-2011. This meant that about 67% of Koreans living in New York State were NYC residents.
Among them, 75% were working age adults (age 18 to 64) and 9% were seniors (age 65 and older). The number of children (under 18 years of age) was over 16,500 and this accounted for 16% of the Korean population in New York City (Asian American Federation Census Information Center, 2013).

Despite the increasing number of Korean immigrants and children of Korean parents in the United States, there has been a dearth of research on these youth. The identity of Korean American youth has gained even less attention despite of its developmental importance. This research started from a recognition that the identity of Korean American youth has never been studied through their life stories. This study is expected to yield a deeper understanding of life stories of Korean Americans and their identity by employing McAdams’ life story model (1985, 1987, 1990).

**Research Questions**

This study asks the following four questions:

1. What do individual life stories of Korean youth in New York City tell us about their identity?
2. How the Korean youth’s perception of ethnic identity is related to their life stories?
3. What are the meanings of “being a Korean” or “Korean-ness” in their everyday discourses?
4. How do Koreans in the United States use the societal images of Koreans when describing their life stories and those of Korean friends?
CHAPTER I
THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Identity development is among the critical developmental tasks in late adolescence and young adulthood, and it affects individual psychological well-being over the life span (Erikson, 1968; McLean, 2005). Accordingly, it has been a research topic in the social sciences for many years with developmental, social, and personality psychologists theorizing it in different ways. A growing area in identity research is the use of life stories. This dissertation uses McAdams’ life story model of identity to draw on the idea that identity is best understood through a person’s life course narratives. To review the theoretical framework of this study, I start with a brief summary of the historical roots of identity research, which later influenced the basic premises of life story model of identity. Second, as McAdams’ life story model largely rests on Erik Erikson’s theory, Erikson’s thoughts about developmental stages of identity are discussed in greater detail. At the end, major conceptions of the life story model are presented. The second half of the chapter is devoted to narrative approaches to identity supported by numerous developmental psychologists. Lastly, the conceptual framework of the present study is summarized at the end of the chapter.

A. Life Story Models of Identity

1. What is a life story model? Every human has different life stories. Numerous scholars have enhanced the conceptual background of studying identity as a life story over the past decades (Bamberg, 1997; Bruner, 1986; McAdams, 1985, 1987, 1990). McAdams (1990, 1996) claims that people living in modern and postmodern societies organize their lives in terms of self-stories. He writes, “A person’s life story provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose” (McAdams, 1990, p.151). He claims that this sense of unity and purpose eventually leads the person to “move forward in a particular direction” (McAdams, 1990, p.151) throughout
his or her lifespan. Bruner (1986) emphasizes the role of story-making in a person’s life arguing that “the vicissitudes of intention” serve as “the essence of a person’s story” (p. 17; quoted in McAdams, 1990, p. 152).

Story-making occurs in a social-cultural context (Bamberg, 1997; Fivush, 1991; Thorne, 2004; Thorne & Nam, 2007). Each individual struggles to find the meanings of his or her story (McLean, 2005) while being situated in a sociocultural setting and tries to figure out whether his or her life story conforms to the standards imposed by social conventions (McAdams, 1985). In this sense, identity is created not only through a process of personal introspection but also through an interaction between a person and a society, where each social and cultural community plays a critical role in the formation of a life story. Since the late 19th century numerous psychologists have advocated an inseparable relationship between a person, her identity, and her sociocultural context.

2. Historical roots of the concept of identity. William James was the first psychologist to view identity as a psychological phenomenon. James (1890) defined it as the “consciousness of personal sameness” (p. 331; quoted in Hammack, 2008, p. 226) that is mirrored in our socially learned behaviors. His conception of the self was not something inherently intra-psychic. Rather, James viewed the self as a psychological product of the interaction of diverse groups of people and their different opinions (James, 1890, 1963). James’ ideas influenced the symbolic interactionism represented by early 20th century scholars such as Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, and Herbert Blumer (Hammack, 2008; Pascale, 2011).

Symbolic interactionism can be traced back to the philosophical roots of American pragmatism, which prevailed in the late 19th century and sprang from the premise that knowledge is acquired through a constant process of managing life tasks and problems (Pascale, 2011).
core of symbolic interactionism rests on the idea that the individual and society constantly interact through shared meaning systems (Baert, 2005; Pascale, 2011). Cooley captured these ideas well when he defined identity as selfhood that is constructed through social interaction. Here the social interaction occurs through the processes of making stories of individuals and exchanging them with others. According to Cooley, the self-concept develops following two separate pathways: (1) the way people recognize a sense of power within themselves to handle their environment and (2) the way people are made aware that their self-image is a reflection of how other people see themselves, hence his term, “looking-glass self.” (Cooley, 1902, pp.179-185; quoted in Hammack, 2008, p. 226). This self—referred to as “relational self”—is more likely to be echoed in everyday conversation with others than located within an individual (Gubrium & Hosltein, 2008, p. 243). Mead expanded on Cooley’s concept of identity by suggesting that identity is socially constructed in and through social engagement. We are not born with the concept of “self,” according to Mead. It develops over time through an individual’s social experiences and activities. He argued that our ongoing everyday conversations constitute our identity (Mead, 1934).

The personality psychologist Henry Murray contributed to the study of identity through his use of idiographic and personological approaches to identity. McAdams’ life story model of identity is directly evolved from Murray’s personality theory. Murray was particularly interested in understanding people holistically through their life histories. He argued that a person should be understood through a history of the person (Murray, 1938). Perhaps best remembered for his quote, “the history of the organism is the organism” (Murray, 1938, p. 39; quoted in McAdams, 1990, p.150). Murray’s research focused on individual histories, which became an important tool for subsequent studies of identity (McAdams, 1990, 2001, 2008). Murray noticed that a person’s
temporally related activities are combined (Murray, 1938). Those activities collectively work to create a narrative unity out of an individual’s life course. Murray’s idea was considered as having developmental conceptions as he claimed that any single episode of human behavior is to be understood in its developmental context (Murray, 1938; McAdams, 1990). Further, Murray’s work laid the foundations for viewing a person through individual processes of involvement in social situations (Hammack, 2008).

3. **Erikson’s identity stage theory.** Not only Henry Murray but also Erik Erikson influenced the conceptual foundation of McAdams’ life story model of identity (McAdams, 1985). Erik Erikson is among the most famous stage theorists in developmental psychology. Expanding on Freud’s psychodynamic theory of personality development, Erikson (1959, 1968) proposed a theory of psychosocial development across the human life cycle. Trained in the Freudian psychodynamic research tradition, he nonetheless moved beyond Freudian theories by suggesting unique perspectives on psychosocial development (Miller, 2011). He suggested eight stages of psychosocial development by juxtaposing a critical developmental task with a crisis for each stage (Erikson, 1959, 1968, 1980). Each crisis was a product of the failure to achieve a developmental task. The eight stages are: (1) birth to 18 months: Trust vs. Mistrust; (2) 18 months to 3 years: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt; (3) 3 to 5 years: Initiative vs. Guilt, (4) 5 to 13 years: Industry vs. Inferiority; (5) 13 to 21 years: Identity vs. Role Confusion; (6) 21 to 39 years: Intimacy vs. Isolation; (7) 40 to 65 years: Generativity vs. Stagnation; and (8) 65 years and older: Ego Integrity vs. Despair (Erikson, 1959, 1968, 1980).

Across these eight stages, the achievement of a developmental task for each stage is juxtaposed to its failed consequences, which in turn trigger a crisis for the individual. Erikson viewed a child’s development and her chances of moving onto the next stage as depending on the
successful completion of developmental tasks associated with each stage (Miller, 2011). If a child does not handle a crisis satisfactorily, she will continue struggling with conflicts connected to the task until the conflicts are eventually resolved later in life. This scenario also applies to the case of identity. Erikson believed that a person’s identity development may not be fully completed by the end of adolescence (Erikson, 1968). That many adults remained in search of an identity supports his idea. Erikson remained sanguine about the timing at which an identity crisis could be addressed, believing that conflicts over identity could be resolved at any time in life (Miller, 2011). What was more important to Erikson was the successful integration of developmental tasks for each stage.

Erikson (1968) argued that the quest for identity held importance in every human life. He was particularly concerned with how identity promoted successful psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968). The formation of identity, though, incorporated more than just the self. Individual identity, which evolves across the eight stages of human life, depended on “a maintenance of an inner solidarity with a group’s ideals and identity” (Erikson, 1959, p.102). Miller (2011) restates it as “the understanding and acceptance of both the self and one’s society,” (p. 148). This ongoing and evolving process involves a full integration of a person’s biological factors, psychological characteristics, and social forces (Erikson, 1959, 1968).

More important, even though Erikson recognized the fifth stage—13 to 21 years: Identity vs. Role Confusion—as the period when most adolescents face a crisis of identity, he acknowledged that identity formation encompasses much of life (Erikson, 1959, 1968). For example, a baby, during her first year, constantly seeks her mother in the hope that she will nourish and comfort her. She establishes basic trust in her mother as a foundation to develop a sense of self and trust in others later in life. With the successful completion of the first stage the
baby moves onto the second stage in which her sense of self and identity will develop in combination with other experiences. Thus, Erikson argued that identity development proceeds by stages. The satisfactory completion of each stage’s tasks continues to influence later stage identity exploration (Erikson, 1959, 1968).

Erikson was among the first to emphasize the importance of context in identity development. An immigrant of German ancestry who came to the United States in his early 30s, he had an interest in the issue of identity development among immigrant youth (Erikson, 1968; Miller, 2011). He specifically noted that immigrants struggle with identity formation in a bicultural or multicultural context, which converges and creates conflict (Erikson, 1968, 1973). Prior to his immigration to the United States, he spent most of his late teens to early twenties as a foreigner in Vienna, where he trained in the Freudian psychodynamic approach to personality (Miller, 2011). He described himself as “a wandering youth and American immigrant,” who felt marginalized by mainstream American society (Miller, 2011; quoted in Evans, 1967, p. 41). His struggle with identity led him to ask what it meant for a person to be away from his or her home country (Miller, 2011). His immigrant identity included the difficulties associated with the loss of his native experiences and his primary language. Adapting to a new culture is likely to be even more challenging when those losses are combined with the unfamiliar environment of a new land. It is not hard to imagine how these concerns made him particularly interested in the identity issues of minority groups (Erikson, 1973; Miller, 2011).

Erikson began to use his term of “identity crisis” while he was working with veterans from the Second World War (Erikson, 1968, p. 17; quoted in Miller, 2011, p. 149). Their loss of identity seemed a crisis to Erikson. He observed that the struggle immigrant adolescents underwent was linked to their adjustment problems in the new society and was similar to the
experiences encountered by soldiers who had been in combat (Miller, 2011). Erikson realized that identity problems could appear in all stages of human life, but adolescence is the pivotal period for identity development. This is because adolescence is when boys and girls begin to seriously question who they are and their role in the world (Erikson, 1968, 1973).

Erikson broke ground by taking into account the role an individual’s social-cultural background has in establishing identity. His contribution was twofold: His view that identity integrated each individual’s biological, psychological, and social-cultural aspects inspired further research into the developmental processes of identity among individuals from different social-cultural backgrounds; second, his stage-based model of identity development across the human life span had an enormous impact on developmental psychologists (Erikson, 1968; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001).


Others pay attention to the adaptive nature of identity in a context (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; Coté & Levine, 2002). Baumeister and Muraven (1996) consider identity “as adaptation to an individual’s social, cultural, and historical context,” the result of both the basic nature of selfhood and the sociocultural context (p. 405). Coté and Levine (2002) stress that
identity is an adaptation to a developmental context and that identity formation is concerned with an individual’s perception of meaningful contexts. The meaningful contexts differ from individual to individual as each individual’s native culture differs. Coté (1996) refers to it as “culture-identity link” (p. 417). Thus, identity is uniquely perceived and developed among individuals in the context of cultural variation (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; Coté & Levine, 2002; Erikson, 1968; Goossens & Phinney, 1996; Hammack, 2008).

It seems clear that identity is to be studied by investigating each individual in a specific context (Adams & Marshall, 1996). In the process, both individual and social functions which vary across diverse cultural contexts may have to be examined (Adams & Marshall, 1996). More important, the fundamental role of cultural variability in identity formation is to be illuminated as an evolving construct in human development (Hammack, 2008). These contextual influences on identity development, however, have been largely neglected in empirical research because of difficulties in determining how best to conceptualize context and study its relationship to identity (Goossens & Phinney, 1996). Life story analysis can be a way to bridge the gap between theories and empirical research in identity.

5. Cultural psychologists’ views of identity development. In line with McAdams’ life story model of identity, cultural psychologists’ views of identity development uphold the importance of culture as a context in identity development. Inspired by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of human development, cultural psychologists have focused on the specific significance of culture for identity development (Hammack, 2008). Some differentiate the individualism of Western cultures, which emphasizes personal achievement and well-being, and non-Western
collectivism, which stresses interdependence and communal values (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989).

Markus and Kitayama (1991) compare U.S. and Japanese culture, characterizing the former as independent and the latter as interdependent. They also studied how the people in each culture approach selfhood through different value systems. “Independent” cultures identify themselves in terms of socially recommended values such as autonomy and being unique within a community (McAdams, 2002). People from “interdependent” cultures depend on group values and identify themselves collectively as a group member (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). South Korean culture is an example of a “collectivistic” culture whereas American culture is an example of an “individualistic” culture (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, 2014, p. 276). In this dissertation, I use this dichotomy to differentiate Korean collectivistic culture from the mainstream, stereotypical, and individualistic American culture, which values individuality and independence (Jones et al., 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989).

These categorizations of culture, as independent or interdependent, have generated their own critiques. For example, Gjerde (2004) pointed out that dichotomous theories of culture and self have oversimplified the diversity of culture into two categories and ignore the complexity and unique qualities of each culture and the relationship between culture and the individual. Marcus and Kitayama’s idea, however, can be useful in that it supports the notion of agency versus communion in McAdams’ life story analysis. Here, agency refers to each individual’s accomplishment whereas communion refers to each individual’s relationships (Adam & Marshall, 1996; McAdams, 2002). Each culture puts a different emphasis on the salience of agency or communion, which is mirrored in its view of self. In this sense, life story analysis can be a way to better understand how different cultural values are reflected in a person’s identity.
6. Life stories emerge and develop in a sociocultural context. Life stories emerge in adolescence, but by the end of adolescence or young adulthood they settle into an ideological setting for his or her identity (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1985; McLean, 2005). An ideological setting refers to a setting that is used as a background for developing specific types of ideology such as love and justice (McAdams, 1985, 1990). The identification of an ideological setting provides a context where each individual’s identity story is created and sustained (McAdams, 1985). Thorne and Nam (2007) report that adolescents found their expression of personal identity in early adolescence and present a relatively complete narrative by the end of adolescence or young adulthood.

Life stories are both psychologically and socioculturally constructed. Each individual works as a storyteller and, at the same time, protagonist at the center of the story (Cohler, 1982; McAdams, 1987, 1990). In this sense, as McAdams (1990) writes, “the person is both historian and history” (p. 151). An analysis of socially constructed identity examines the processes by which tellers and listeners actively engage in narrating and communicating their past experiences and make sense of them during the specific moments of telling a story in a given social setting (Bamberg, 1997; Fivush, 1991; Thorne & Nam, 2007). From this perspective, personal identity formation is a psychosocial project and thus affected by the values and culture of their society and community. In addition, identity is shaped depending upon the identity characteristics of the people to whom we deliver our stories (Thorne & Nam, 2007).

Though this notion of sociocultural construction of identity is a premise of life story models of identity, researchers have paid less attention to this issue in empirical studies. Bruner (1990) highlights how each community’s unique and particular characteristics and needs are involved in the changing process of the conception of the self. More important, perceptions of
the self are not an issue of personal choice or free will but are imposed by a social community. Therefore, identity development is to be understood through a full investigation of one’s identity communities and to whom the person tells his or her life story and who listens to their stories (Thorne & Nam, 2007).

**B. Narrative Approaches to Identity**

1. **What do personal narratives tell us about identity?** The term narrative is defined in multiple ways. For example, Shore (1996) puts it, “On the one hand, narrative refers to the activity of adjusting and creating reality through talking it out, i.e., the activity whereby people use stories to make sense of their worlds. On the other hand, narrative also refers to the instituted result of this structuring process,” (p. 58, quoted in Herman, 2003, p. 170). Herman (2003) redefines narrative as “at once a class of cultural artifacts and a cognitive-communicative process for creating, identifying, and interpreting candidate members of that artifactual class,” (p. 170). These definitions explain why personal narratives have become a powerful method for understanding individual life histories.

Scholars have increasingly relied on personal narratives to study identity (Bamberg, 1997; Bruner, 1986, 1990; Fivush, 1991; Gjerde, 2004; Gregg, 2007; Hammack, 2008; McAdams, 1990, 1993, 2001; McLean, 2005; McLean & Pratt, 2006; Schachter, 2004, 2005). Bruner (1986) argues that how people construct their stories tells us who they are. Nelson (2003) added that the stories are constructed using individuals’ autobiographical memories and that collective narratives serve as sources for developing a sense of self. Fivush (1991) noted that identity is socially constructed as stories are told in social interaction. McAdams (1990) has argued that “a person’s life story provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose” (p. 151). Hammack (2008) suggests that identity—as a cognition of self—is developed through a
meaning-making discourse with those who belong to the same groups. This cognitive component of identity serves both as a content of an individual’s discourse and as a structure of the story (Hammack, 2008). Thus, to fully know a person, we should go beyond knowing the person’s traits or characteristics and listening to his or her life stories (McAdams, 1995, 1996, 2001).

Human development—when it is viewed as a process of identity development—evolves through the construction of meaning-embedded personal narratives over the course of a life span (Cohler, 1982; Hammack, 2008). The meaning-making behavior (McLean, 2005; McLean & Pratt, 2006) is achieved through psychosocial and cultural construction processes (Hammack, 2008). Baumeister and Muraven (1996), Schachter (2004, 2005), and Hammack (2008) have brought attention to the role that individual discourse as a reflection of personal history and culture has played in identity formation. Schachter’s concept of identity suggests that a person’s identity is inevitably intertwined with his cultural and historical background, which is mirrored in the individual’s discourse (Schachter, 2004, 2005). Thus, an individual’s discourse on life is an integration of psychological experiences, which are inevitably intertwined with social and cultural circumstances.

In this era of multiplicity—people with different social, cultural, ethnic, and historical backgrounds—and globalization (Giddens, 1991) individuals strive to achieve personal goals and objectives in life while struggling with the issue of identity (Hammack, 2008). A narrative approach to identity helps us better understand this complexity in that it allows us to look at people’s lives through the lenses of their life stories. By applying narrative perspectives on identity, researchers can elucidate how an individual describes the reality of the social and cultural context on the basis of internalized thoughts and consciousness and how this storytelling
further serves to create meaning and purpose for the individual (Hammack, 2008; McAdams, 1996, 1997).

2. The sociocultural construction of personal narratives. Personal narratives are socially constructed (Fivush, 1991, 1998). When we tell somebody a story about ourselves, the story includes when and how it happened and who else was a protagonist with us. People recollect how they thought, felt, and behaved when a specific event occurred. In this way, storytelling plays a crucial role in defining our self-concept (Fivush, 1991). Scholars have found that major components of child-adult interaction emerge at the earliest stages of the life span (Fivush, 1991, 1998; Miller & Sperry, 1988; Nelson, 1988). Young children begin to tell stories through social engagement by participating in conversations with adults once they possess the ability to communicate verbally (Fivush, 1991). Then it becomes an integral part of their daily lives.

Storytelling is linguistically and culturally unique. Each culture has its own form and structure of story narratives including a grammar of the language (Fivush, 1991). Cultural traditions and values shape story content (Fivush, 1991; Mandler, 1987; Rumelhart, 1975). Children learn how to construct a story through adult-guided conversations using culturally specific forms and structure that they fill with content (Fivush, 1991). The processes enable children to learn how to order separate piece of information in a coherent way while including their thoughts (Fivush, Haden, & Adam, 1995). Sometimes they add background stories or their evaluations of the situation. Likewise, personal narratives function both as a way of organizing discrete information of events and as a way of presenting subjective opinions (Fivush et al., 1995; Labov, 1982; McCabe & Peterson, 1991).
Personal narratives are verbal representations of personal memories, specifically autobiographical memory (Fivush, 1998; Nelson, 1993; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). Nelson (1993) defines autobiographical memory as “a personal representation of general or specific events and personal facts” (p.7). An individual’s autobiographical memory and narrative are inextricably intertwined to the point where sometimes it is almost impossible to separate the two. Personal narratives organize “coherent memories” about ourselves (Fivush, 1998, p. 484; Nelson, 1993; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). Through the use of narratives, children can develop robust autobiographical memories that, in turn, serve as tools for the construction of their “self-concepts” (Fivush, 1991, p. 59). This reciprocal relationship between a person’s autobiographical memory and narrative occurs in a social-cultural context (Fivush, 1991, 1998). As children grow, their autobiographical memories evolve across different developmental stages reflecting each child’s history (Nelson, 2004).

3. The key features of narrative discourses. Despite the increased interest in narrative approaches in different research areas such as psychology, anthropology, linguistics, literary studies, sociology, etc., there is no agreed definition of the term or unified method of analysis (Karlberg, 2012). Definitions depend on research interests and study focuses. Yet there is an underlying assumption on which discourse researchers mostly agree and use for empirical studies. That is, as Karlberg puts it, “language and language use do not merely reflect or represent our social and mental realities, but they actually help construct or constitute these realities” (Karlberg, 2012, p.1). When this assumption is applied to identity research, language and language use not only reflect the identity of individuals but also involve its own construction process.

Narrative discourses have their own structural and functional properties (Karlberg, 2012; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). McKinlay and McVittie (2008) write, “Researchers do not view
discourse merely as a medium through which the researcher can discover something about research participants’ inner mental worlds. Instead, discourse is viewed as a phenomenon which has its own properties, properties which have an impact on people and their social interactions” (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008, p. 8; quoted in Karlberg, 2012, p. 1). In addition, Riessman (2008) identifies several key features of narrative discourses: (1) Stories use a format in which a speaker talks to an audience; (2) stories revolve around events; (3) events are sequenced and convey meanings from the speaker to the listener; and (4) events can be analyzed in multiple ways according to the meanings, structures, and ideas of the contents.

4. Developmental aspects of narratives. There is an increased use of narratives in developmental studies. Several developmental aspects of narrative discourses explain this. Daiute and Lightfoot (2004) argue that narrative discourse provides us with a powerful sociohistorical context in which human development occurs. Accordingly, narrative processes are developmental along four axes: (1) “the imagery quality of narrating is developmental”; (2) “as a cultural tool, narrating is developmental”; (3) “development is multiple and cyclical, like the multiple voicing in narrative”; and (4) “narrative skills require development” (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, pp. xiii-xvii).

First, “narrating is developmental,” because it involves stories revolving around mental processes such as memory, imagination, and new ways of thinking (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. xiv). Sarbin (2004, p.6) writes, “Organismic involvement is the means through which narrative-inspired imaginings can influence belief and action.” Thus, he claims that narrative inspires imagination, and imagination affects belief and action. These beliefs and actions often cause new ways of thinking. Bruner (1990) argues that each individual uses different ways in elaborating narratives, which gives them more possibilities for psychological development.
Second, “as a cultural tool, narrating is developmental,” because it reflects cultural values and morality (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. xiv). Individual life stories are mirrored in personal and cultural or master narratives resonating with cultural symbols and values with which the cultural self is created. The cultural self, according to a Vygotskian perspective, is co-constructed in collaboration with parents and others (Nelson, 2004). Nelson (2004) demonstrates that young children become familiar with the cultural forms of narrative even before they understand the functional use of their native language. She explains that this is because children practice a native cultural self by repeating everyday routines and practices appropriate to their families and home culture (Nelson, 2004). Daiute (2004) reports that children’s narratives about personal experiences of conflict were directly influenced by the way teachers convey the associated values in class.

Third, “narrating is developmental,” because narratives use “multiple voicings,” which resemble the “multiple and cyclical” nature of development (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. xvi). Narratives enable us to look at the complex nature of human behavior and development. Bamberg (2004a) argues that a narrator constantly seeks a way to create and deliver personal stories in different forms according to the context and points of the message. Freeman (1993, 2004) used the term, “rewriting the self” (p. 71) to point out that the process of creating new ways of presenting stories is similar to the process of rebuilding a self-concept.

Finally, “narrating is developmental,” because it “requires the development of various specific culturally defined discourse skills” (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. xvii). Researchers have attempted to link the development of language skills to self-concepts in children. For example, Nelson (2004) studied the emergence of crib talk and its development into a fully communicable language with caregivers by observing an infant longitudinally. She argues that this linguistic
aspect of a narrative is purely developmental and that it requires a close collaboration between an infant and a caregiver (Nelson, 2004).

C. A Summary of the Conceptual Framework of the Current Study

1. Understanding the identity of Korean youth in the United States through their life stories. To investigate how Korean American young adults see themselves, this study starts from the assumption that our ways of thinking about ourselves in the immediate and extended socio-historical context are mediated through personal narratives (Bamberg, 2004a; Bruner, 2001). “Personal narrative is a way of using language or another symbolic system to imbue life events with a temporal and logical order, to demystify them and establish coherence across past, present, and as yet unrealized experience,” (Ochs & Capps, 2001, p. 2). Thus, this study was designed to apply McAdams’ life story model of identity and used participants’ life story narratives as a major source of data. My task was to listen to Korean American young adults’ ways of conceptualizing their life stories by providing them with opportunities to talk about their experiences in the United States and observe how they make sense of their life stories.

2. Combining narrative approaches and ethnography. This study was designed to combine narrative approaches to identity with life story models and ethnographic research techniques. I myself am a Korean and have the same sociocultural and ethnic background as the research participants. Narrating, as a way of sharing a person’s past experience, has become a central method in ethnographic research studies (Cortazzi, 2001). Narrative inquiry should be combined with ethnographic research to study individual lives because it allows us to interpret the stories that people present of their lives alongside careful observation of what they actually do and their reasoning behind their action (Cortazzi, 2001; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). Scholars from various research disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, and literary
studies have long advocated narrative analysis as an overarching technique to investigate people’s experiences from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Cortazzi, 1993, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993; Toolan, 1988).

Combining narrative approaches and ethnography has considerable benefit for understanding life experiences of people from different sociocultural backgrounds (Cortazzi, 2001): (1) through a careful analysis of people’s storied lives, researchers can access meaning-making events in specific cultural-ethnic contexts; (2) culture can be used as a lens through which researchers look at people’s lives as reflected in their stories; (3) the contexts of telling stories as well as the topics, content, and style are all included and considered in analysis; (4) researchers can deal with narratives not only as a meaningful product of individuals but also as a social process in which peoples’ life stories are created and constructed; and (5) by assuming that narrative is co-constructed in social-cultural contexts, researchers can examine the roles that people have as either protagonists or audience and how jointly constructed stories provide meaning to people’s lives. In the following chapter, I will review the empirical studies.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

My interest in the identity of Korean American youth originated with my readings about Asian Americans in the United States and personal conversations with Korean American youth. In this chapter, I review four areas of research: (1) the limited literature of the past three decades on Koreans in the United States, (2) research on Korean American identity, (3) research on identity and life stories, and (4) three studies of Korean youth that use a narrative approach to describe their lives in the United States. Following the review of empirical research, I present my rationale for the current study.

A. Studies on Korean Youth in the United States

Despite their increasing numbers in the United States, there has been a dearth of information about Koreans and children of Korean parents. Like other ethnic groups, Korean American students and their families may experience difficulties at school or home related to language barriers or cultural differences (Min & Kim, 200). They may also generally struggle with the problem of identity conflict resulting from their minority status. Korean American youth struggle with issues of racial prejudice (Park, Schwartz, Lee, Kim, & Rodriguez, 2013; Shin, D’Antonio, Son, Kim, & Park, 2011) and experience a value conflict between their ethnic group and mainstream U.S. culture (Kim, Cain, & McCubbin, 2006; Kim, Sarason, & Sarason, 2006; Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Yeh, 2003; Yeh, Ma, Madan-Bahel, Hunter, Jung, Kim, Akitaya, & Sasaki, 2005). Further, the discrimination Korean youth face discourages positive identity formation, which, in turn, negatively affects developmental outcomes (Park et al., 2013; Shin et al., 2011).

Studies on Koreans living in the U.S have increased over the past two decades, but most research has typically focused on Korean students’ academic performance (Cho, Hudley, & Back, 2003; Jang, Reeve, Ryan, & Kim, 2009; Jung & Stinnett, 2005; Lee, 2002b; Zhou & Kim, 2006), cultural adjustment and mental health (Kim, Cain, & McCubbin, 2006; Kim, Sarason, & Sarason, 2006; Lee & Koro-Ljungberg, 2007; Yeh, 2003; Yeh et al., 2005) or perceptions of prejudice or discrimination (Park et al., 2013; Shin et al., 2011). Other research has included Korean language use in the home (Cho, 2000; Lee, 2002a; Lee & Shin, 2008), investigations of family related variables such as parent-child relationships (Kim, 2008; Kim & Park, 2011; Yang & Rettig, 2003), and the implications of school maladjustment and behavior problems among Korean American students (Lew, 2004; Park et al., 2013; Suh & Satcher, 2005).

B. Research on Korean American Identity

Previous studies on the identity of Koreans in the United States have revealed a couple of commonalities. First, the majority of research involved quantitative survey analysis. They were meant to provide descriptive generalizations or predict outcomes. Second, studies had relatively
small numbers of participants, especially when Koreans were part of multiple ethnic group comparisons. Third, identity was viewed as only a predictor or an outcome variable in association with other variables. Finally, there are different sub-categories of identity, but these subtypes have not been precisely defined or measured. Instead, most studies considered a limited conception of each subtype rather than looking at it as a whole. The following sections address each of these four issues.

1. **Clarification on subtypes of identity.** Identity can be classified into several subtypes depending on the context and focus of research. Racial identity and ethnic identity have been interchangeably used in empirical studies (Quintana, 2007). These two identities, however, are different from each other. Racial identity is a term that is based upon one’s genetic and biological characteristics, whereas ethnic identity refers to one’s sense of self as shared by factors such as culture, race, language, or kinship (Quintana, Aboud, Chao, Contreras-Grau, Cross, Hudley, Hughes, Liben, Nelson-LeGall, & Vietze, 2006; Smith & Silva, 2011). While it is true that racial and ethnic identities are different, the two terms are closely interrelated. For example, racial identity is biologically determined, but it also has socially constructed implications (Quintana et al., 2006) that are associated with unique experiences of specific racial group of people (Smith & Silva, 2011). Quintana et al. (2006) stress the importance of looking at racial and ethnic identities as distinct entities because each identity may imply somewhat different developmental outcomes.

Other subtypes include personal and cultural identity. Schwartz et al. define personal identity as an individual’s set of goals, values, and beliefs that he or she develops, such as career, relationships, and religious beliefs (Schwartz, Kim, Whitbourne, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, Forthun, & Luyckx, 2013). On the other hand, cultural identity refers to ethnically- or culturally-
based practices, values, and identifications. They often have a particular salience for immigrants, children of immigrants, and individuals from minority groups (Schwartz et al., 2013). Collectively, the identity of Korean American youth reflects an awareness of their race (Asians), ethnicity (Koreans), commitment to cultural values (as either Americans or Koreans), and human individuality.

2. Empirical studies on Asian American identity including a group of Koreans.

Atkinson and Gim (1989) were the first to study the nexus of cultural identity and attitudes towards mental health services among Asian Americans. Cultural identity was used as a way to understand participants’ level of cultural adaptation to American culture. They conducted a large-scale quantitative study with 557 Asian American college students from three ethnic groups—Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. A total of 109 Korean Americans participated in the study. Subjects filled out the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (Suinn, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987) and the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPHS). Data analysis incorporated a 3×2×2 multivariate analysis paradigm. The results showed that highly acculturated students were: (1) most likely to seek for professional help, (2) resistant to the stigmatization through psychological assistance, and (3) most open-minded about discussing their mental problems. These findings were present regardless of the ethnicity or gender of the participants. The results imply that regardless of Asian Americans’ ethnic identity, their cultural identity was more important in explaining their attitudes toward mental health problems and the help-seeking behaviors of these populations (Atkinson & Gim, 1989).

The study had several limitations, nonetheless. First, it was a large quantitative study in which a survey method was used as a way of assessing the cultural identity of the participants.
Their work revealed problems, self-report and instrumentation issues, typical of survey research. Second, the cultural identity of the participants was used as a predictor of seeking professional mental health help. Identity was viewed solely as a subcategory of acculturation. Third, the authors compared the three ethnic groups—Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans—but found few differences. Due to the relatively small number of Koreans in the study, differences between groups showed little statistical significance.

Kibria (1997) studied sixty second-generation Chinese Americans and Korean Americans through in-depth interviews. The qualitative study investigated how intermarriage and ethnic identity were associated. She explored the ethnic identity of the two groups through their views and beliefs about intermarriage, which was expected to explain participants’ ethnic identification given that the preference for exogamy in Chinese and Korean populations is low. Surprisingly, the percentage of interracial marriage including intra-Asian marriages was substantially high among second generation Chinese Americans and Korean Americans. The study results showed that the construction of “Asian American-ness” is a process that covers ubiquitous and broad experiences in American society among those who are labeled people of color (p. 524). These experiences included having orientations towards people of Asian origin and adhering to an emphasis on family relationships, respect for the elderly, desire for education, hard work, and similar values. The ethnic identity of the Chinese and Korean participants was in the process of construction, i.e., “ethnogenesis” (p. 525), and their racial labeling played a pivotal role in the process (Kibria, 1997). The process of ethnogenesis was also mediated by the informants’ immigration experiences as mirrored in their immigrant narratives.

Kibria’s study (1997) has two implications. First, she looked at ethnic identity as something that is constructed through life experiences, specifically, in the history of family
immigration to the United States. Second, she investigated how identity is reflected in life events and stories by analyzing personal narratives. Her interpretation, though, was limited by the selective nature of the sample. Each research participant was from a middle-class family, held a graduate degree, and had a professional occupation. Most fit the model minority stereotype. It reminds us of the need for studying a more diverse sample of Korean Americans.

3. Empirical studies on Korean American identity. Chong’s sociological study (1998) investigated the role of Christian faith in developing ethnic identity in second-generation Korean Americans. A qualitative study using in-depth interviews and participant observation, it explored how the religious activities of Korean American Christians were linked to the construction and reinforcement of ethnic identity. Chong interviewed 62 lay members and church leaders from two churches in the Chicago area and attended a variety of church activities including sitting in on Sunday services and bible study during the week. The study reported that these Korean ethnic churches provided a vehicle for second-generation Koreans to consolidate their ethnicity and played a critical role in cultural reproduction. Traditional Korean values were transmitted to second-generation Koreans and defended their marginalized status when dropping out of mainstream U.S. society.

Chong (1998) verified that the Korean ethnic churches were venues for group cohesion in two ways: First, with institutional protection Korean traditional culture could be conserved and transmitted from generation to generation. Second, their conservative Christian morality, worldview, and traditional Korean values generated a synergistic effect that strengthened the cultural and ethnic identification of second-generation Korean Americans (Chong, 1998). The implications of this study, which are relevant to my research, suggest that Christian faith has a psychological role in the construction and representation of identity.
Jo’s year-long ethnographic study (2001) investigated Korean American student struggles with heritage language learning and their ethnic identity. The participants were 1.5 generation Korean American college students attending the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The study explored how learning the Korean language was related to their ethnic identity formation or transformation. The study found that Korean American college students’ ethnic identity was not directly linked to their language learning experiences. For example, these students’ sense of being Korean was not diluted by becoming English speakers. More important, their acquisition of Korean did not necessarily mean they formed their ethnic identity homogenously. The Korean American students’ use of language, English and Korean, reflected their diverse social, cultural, and historical backgrounds—time of immigration, residential area, citizenship, etc. (Jo, 2001). As an ethnography, this study captured well how their experience teaching and learning Korean was associated with their sense of being second-generation Koreans in U.S schools. What the study did not explore, though, was how identity developed over time.

Lee et al. studied the different migration experiences and ethnic identity of Koreans living in the United States and China (Lee, Falbo, Doh, & Park, 2001). It was a large quantitative study in which the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) was administered to 316 undergraduate college students, 118 Korean Americans and 177 Korean Chinese. The research findings demonstrated that Korean American students had higher scores on the ethnic identity measure than Korean Chinese students. Korean American students were more likely to be bicultural than were their Korean Chinese counterparts, and Korean Chinese students showed greater tendency toward traditional cultural orientation than Korean American students (Lee et al., 2001). It is questionable, however, whether the comparison is appropriate for two reasons. First, the sociocultural context of the United States and China are different. Second, is the
problem of sample size. The number of Korean American participants was much smaller than Korean Chinese. Most important, measuring ethnic identity quantitatively outside of its particular context falsely suggests that ethnic identity is an essential and invariable quality.

Lee (2002a) investigated the role of cultural identity in maintaining heritage language among Korean American youth. Forty second-generation Korean American college students participated in a quantitative and qualitative study in which data were collected and analyzed to understand the relationship between their cultural identity and Korean language proficiency. The study results indicated that most participants showed a basic level of Korean proficiency. These youth understood that heritage language learning was important, but they reported a lack of opportunity to learn the language within their community. They reported that they lacked motivation to study their heritage language primarily because of an absence of societal recognition of the importance of maintaining their heritage language. Korean American youth appeared to have bicultural identities, combining both Korean and American cultural characteristics. Their heritage language proficiency was positively correlated to their bicultural identification (Lee, 2002a). The study provided a descriptive analysis showing how Korean American youth’s heritage language maintenance was related to their cultural identity.

Jung and Lee’s (2004) ethnographic study explored the cultural identity of Korean American students from two U.S. colleges. The study examined the specific social and cultural contexts of cultural identity that Korean American college students had constructed. Researchers took a close look at three social-cultural experiences—peer group relations, family environment, and media use—and analyzed how each factor was associated with the participants’ ethnic identity construction over a six-month period of participant observation. The authors found that a majority of the students identified themselves as Korean or Korean American rather than
American despite their U.S. citizenship. Each student’s family was an important factor in the construction of ethnic identity through Korean language learning and the transmission of Korean cultural values and customs. Korea’s mass media, for example, TV shows and movies shared through mobile phones and the internet, also played a crucial role, teaching youth about Korean culture and society. These social cultural experiences strengthened the solidarity of the Korean community in the United States (Jung & Lee, 2004).

Their work has important implications for my research. First, the authors conceived cultural identity as “a socially, historically, and culturally grounded entity, as well as the product of particular social interactions rather than as a fixed abstraction” (p. 160). So, the cultural identity of Korean young adults living in the United States goes through “the ongoing processes of positioning and repositioning their sense of self in diasporic social-cultural contexts” (p. 160). Second, these processes of (re)positioning the cultural self, i.e., being Korean and the meaning of Korean-ness are situated in everyday conversations with intra-ethnic members. The conversations include transnational communications with family members through the use of telecommunication technology. The study may be limited, though, because of its relatively short observation period and major focus on an analysis of communication rather than the psychological processes in the configuration of identity.

Shrake and Rhee (2004) studied how the ethnic identity of 217 Korean American high school students was related to their problem behaviors. It was a quantitative study in which ethnic identity was used as a predictor of problem behaviors in these youth. The study examined three dimensions of ethnic identity—level of ethnic identity, attitudes toward other groups, and perceived discrimination—as they relate to problem behaviors in Korean American adolescents. The data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis, which showed that ethnic identity,
perceived discrimination, and academic performance were strongly associated with Korean American adolescents’ internalization and externalization of problem behaviors. For example, a sense of belonging to the Korean ethnic group was negatively linked to incidence of problem behaviors. In other words, the higher their ethnic identity, the lower the incidence of problem behaviors. In addition, the prevalence of problem behaviors in these youth was positively correlated with their perceptions of racial discrimination. Each student’s self-reported GPA as a measure of academic performance was negatively associated with their externalizing behavior problems. That is, adolescents who reported higher GPAs showed less externalizing behavior problems (Shrake & Rhee, 2004). Since it was a large quantitative study looking at ethnic identity as a predictor of problem behavior among Korean American adolescents, it was able to explain neither the processes of identity construction nor contextual influences on the development of identity.

Lee (2005) studied the role of ethnic identity and other group orientations as protective factors against ethnic discrimination among Korean American college students. A total of 84 Korean American students attending U.S. colleges participated in the study, which investigated resilience in the context of perceived ethnic discrimination. The study hypothesized that multidimensional ethnic identity and other-group orientation would work as protective factors for these youth and would moderate the negative effects of discrimination. The hypotheses were partially confirmed. Only one aspect of ethnic identity, “ethnic identity pride,” showed a moderation effect (p. 36). Pride in ethnic identity worked as a protective factor that moderated the effects of discrimination on depressive symptoms and social connectedness. There was, however, no moderation effect from pride in ethnic identity on self-esteem (Lee, 2005). The study may have implications for helping youth with mental health issues caused by perceptions
of discrimination, though the relatively small sample suggests that caution should be exercised in interpreting the results.

Lew’s (2006) qualitative study using in-depth interviews and participant observation techniques explored the relationship of identity and achievement among Korean American students in urban schools. A total of 72 students participated in the study of how different social and economic contexts intertwined with the racial and ethnic identity of Korean American students: 42 students were from high-achieving, and 30 were from low-achieving groups. The low-achieving group was recruited from a community-based GED program in New York City.

The study results showed that the Korean American students from both groups constantly negotiated their identity to meet the needs of their socioeconomic and cultural contexts. For example, high-achieving Korean American students from the middle class identified themselves as being both “Korean” and “American,” but at the same time they recognized their minority status. They also thought that they would never be considered as Americans, even if they were born in the United States and had U.S. citizenship. These middle-class high-achieving students considered education as a vehicle to improve their minority status. On the other hand, low-achieving students from the GED program who were high school dropouts did not think much about their identity as being Korean. Instead, these students, who were mostly from lower-class families, associated their “minority status” (p. 349) with their poverty, low education, and connection to students from other racial minority groups. Thus, the Korean students’ recognition of their minority status has to do with a variety of factors such as school achievement and environment, socioeconomic status, home environment, race, and ethnicity (Lew, 2006).

Palmer (2007) explored the identity negotiations of six Korea-born Korean American (KBKA) high school students. This study presented two types of identity—“ascribed identity in
America-born Korean Americans (ABKAs)” and “achieved identity in Korea-born Korean Americans (KBKAs)” (p. 278). The two types of identity originated from the tension among Koreans in the United States when it comes to the question, “Who is an authentic Korean?” (p.278). The tension usually happens between two groups of Koreans living in the United States—second-generation (U.S.-born) Korean Americans and 1.5-generation (Korea-born) Korean Americans. For example, a second-generation Korean American student may not get along well with a newly immigrated Korean American student because of the student’s limited English language ability or differences in life style. On the other hand, the newly immigrated Korea-born student may not consider the second-generation (U.S.-born) student an authentic Korean due to the student’s too Americanized style or not speaking Korean well or lack of knowledge about Korean culture.

Palmer’s study illustrated how America-born Korean American students’ ascribed identity influenced KBKA high school students’ achieved identity and how KBKA students exert efforts to be recognized by ABKA peers in the process of identity achievement. The study findings suggest that the KBKA students were not only seeking recognition from their ABKA peers by trying to fit in mainstream U.S. culture but also struggling not to lose their Korean-ness by resisting becoming like ABKA students. These KBKA students constantly negotiated between being an authentic Korean and wanting to be an authentic American. This study demonstrated that identity is multifaceted and fluid at its most basic and that the processes of identity negotiation deserve more attention (Palmer, 2007).

Park (2007) studied the mediating role of ethnic identity in the enculturation of Korean American adolescents within familial and cultural contexts. The quantitative study used a mediation model. A total of 112 Korean American adolescents aged 11 to 19 living in the
Midwest participated in the study. The researchers asked what role ethnic identity plays in three family processes—family cohesion, communication, and conflict—and one aspect of enculturation, Korean language fluency. Park found that the Korean American adolescents’ “ethnic identity partially mediated the influence of family cohesion on Korean language fluency” (p. 403). In other words, Korean American youth with more cohesive family backgrounds were more likely to have higher levels of Korean ethnic identity than their peers from less cohesive families, and higher levels of Korean ethnic identity were associated with higher levels of Korean language fluency than lower levels of Korean ethnic identity. This study implies that ethnic identity may work as a cohesive mechanism through which family relations influence adolescents’ heritage language fluency (Park, 2007).

The study, however, has three limitations. First, it used a relatively small sample, and the statistical power to detect the mediation effect of the ethnic identity was weak. Second, family variables were based only on the adolescent self-reports. Finally, quantitative analysis techniques that determine correlation and mediation effects were not designed to detect how family processes, Korean language use, and ethnic identity varied according to the relationships or functioning of individual Korean adolescents in their families.

C. Research on Identity and Life Stories

Numerous researchers have recently linked identity to life stories (Bamberg, 2004b; Hammack, 2006; McLean, 2005; McLean & Pratt, 2006; Schachter, 2004, 2005). Bamberg (2004b) studied the process of identity construction in 15-year-olds by analyzing their ‘slut-bashing’ remarks. Five 15-year-old boys participated in the study. These boys got involved in a group conversation about an incidence of female promiscuity in the presence of an adult moderator. During the discussion, the young participants engaged in slut-bashing. The data were
analyzed in three steps (p. 331): First, the story characters were positioned in story time and space. Second, each participant’s position was arranged in relation to another during the interaction. The final stage of analysis was conducted regarding how the first two levels of analysis were linked to the development of each participant’s position about female promiscuity within a set of master narratives, i.e., “normative and traditional discourse with regard to what it means to be male” (p. 348). This study has significance for my study in two ways. First, it focused on the process of male identity construction by listening to and analyzing participant narratives. Second, the master narratives played a role in the processes of identity constructions. For example, the male adolescents’ self-positioning in the study was closely associated with their identity formation (Bamberg, 2004b).

Schachter (2004) investigated personal identity conflicts among young, Orthodox Jewish adults. Drawing on Erikson’s “identity configuration” (p. 167) construct, the author scrutinized identity construction processes in 30 young adult Orthodox Jews, 15 males and 15 females. The participants narrated accounts of their religious development and sexual development. The topic was chosen because sexuality was considered “one domain in which traditional religious and modern liberal perspectives are potentially at odds” (p. 174). Each participant’s narratives were analyzed to elucidate the configurational process that led to identity formation in the sociocultural context of the Jewish community. Schachter (2004) demonstrated that the identity configurations of young orthodox adults were ongoing, and that their deliberations about their identity were portrayed in multiple ways. That is, the young Jewish adults made efforts to figure out how to navigate relationships through the development of their conflicting identities (Schachter, 2004). This study confirms that identity development is an ongoing process, and that is connected to each individual’s unique contexts. As Schachter (2004) puts it, “a universal
psychological model of identity development cannot continue to ignore variations in cultural contexts, as context is involved in the most basic processes of identity development” (p. 196).

Schachter (2005) reported a case study in which he explored the identity of the “individual-in-context” (p. 375). Revisiting Erikson’s concept of identity with its emphasis on the role context of each individual, he analyzed how life stories portrayed individual attempts to form an identity. Life stories reveal that identity configuration is an ongoing project intertwined with the narrator’s unique sociocultural context, i.e., pre-modern, modern, and post-modern contexts in terms of religious, familial, military, and educational backgrounds. Each context was closely associated with identity development processes in both content and structure of identity. This suggests that individuals can have a variety of identity structures and numerous developmental trajectories. Schachter’s findings demonstrated that Erikson’s idea of identity configuration can address the diversity and dynamic nature of identity development in each person, i.e., to understand the individual-in-context. The study proves that the configuration process of identity is goal-oriented and co-constructive and suggests that identity development should be redefined as such (Schachter, 2005).

McLean (2005) examined how personally important autobiographical memories were used for the identity construction of young people. One hundred and eighty-five youth aged from 16 to 27 years answered a paper-based Self-Defining Memory Questionnaire while in a room alone. The questionnaire asked about self-defining memories, “that is vivid, highly memorable, personally important, at least 1 year old, and the kind of memory that conveys powerfully how one has come to be the person one currently is” (p. 685; Singer & Moffitt, 1991–1992, p. 242). The study made two assumptions: First, self-defining memories would serve as a way to understand a person’s identity as a life story. Second, the way these memories were told provides
us with an understanding of the social component of narrative identity development. The results showed that the meaning-making in the youths’ narratives had more to do with entertainment than with self-explanation. That is, late adolescents found it entertaining to share their life stories with peers but less so with parents. Yet they change the audiences with whom they speak as they grow older. This leads them to change the way they tell their life stories, focusing on different aspects of the stories with varying importance and implications. McLean’s research illustrated that autobiographical memory-telling plays a crucial role in youth identity construction, which is at the intersection of personal and social worlds (McLean, 2005).

Hammack (2006) investigated the life stories of 30 Israeli and Palestinian adolescents in two American-based coexistence programs through participant observation and a fieldwork approach. A primary research question was the young people’s ideological identifications and the ways in which participation in the program affected their life-story narratives. Hammack conducted life-story interviews with the youth for two continuous summers. To supplement the interview data, he conducted ethnographic, longitudinal fieldwork in Israel and the Palestinian territories. Before attending the coexistence programs, the Israeli and Palestinian youths’ identities were polarized. In each group they identified themselves in terms of an in-group ideology and showed little understanding of the out-group’s perspective.

The study results showed that after participating in the programs, these youth revealed three patterns of identity-related outcomes. First, the most common outcome was “identity transcendence” (p. 348). It appeared in youth who immediately reduced their in-group ideology and increased their understanding of their out-group ideological perspective. In other words, they began to understand the perspective of their counterparts. Second, most youth showed “identity accentuation” (p. 352) as a long-term effect. They eventually conformed to their in-group
identity narrative as the way in which they wanted to identify themselves. Finally, a group of youth exhibited “identity conflict” (p. 356), which made integrating their camp coexistence experience in their life stories difficult. The study’s findings implied that “identity intervention” (p. 360) is quite challenging, particularly when it comes to an intractable conflict. Also, a context-specific theory of identity is needed to better understand the types of “polarized identities” (p. 323) that cause ongoing conflicts across generations (Hammack, 2006).

McLean and Pratt (2006) tested the relationships of two different models of identity development: the identity status model and the narrative life story model. A total of 896 young adults participated in a longitudinal study over a six-year period. At the start, the adolescents (their mean age was 17.4 years) completed a questionnaire. Two years later, 337 of them responded to a follow-up survey (38% of the initial group remained and their mean age became 19.2 years). Six years after the original survey, a third follow-up survey was administered to the original group of 896 youth. The response rate was 32% and their mean age was 23 years. Their turning-point narratives were included in the final survey and a total of 200 young adults provided life stories. Each youth’s identity status was recorded at several points across adolescence and emerging adulthood using the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS; Adams, Shea, & Fitch, 1979). Each participant’s narrative was coded according to the categories of meaning-making, the event type in the narrative, and the emotional tone of the narrative. The researchers defined meaning-making as “connecting the turning point to some aspect of or understanding of oneself” (p.714).

The study findings showed that the youth who presented less sophisticated meaning-making categories tended to be less advanced in their diffusion and foreclosure statuses. Those with more sophisticated meaning-making tended to be mature in their overall identity maturity
index. There was a positive correlation in meaning and generativity, and in meaning and optimism at age 23. The positive association of meaning with other life experiences such as mortality experiences and redemptive stories was also found. On the other hand, a negative association was found in meaning and achievement stories. The study results implied that identity exploration in individuals should be understood in connection with personal turning-point stories. Each person’s identity status reflects broad dimensions of life events and varies across personal experiences. An individual’s life narrative brings life experiences and meanings together and may be used as a way to explain status in identity development (McLean & Pratt, 2006).

Besides the aforementioned research on identity and life stories, few studies have employed the life story approach to investigating the identity of minority youth such as Asian and Hispanic youth. Among Asians, empirical studies have largely focused on Chinese immigrants because they are the largest Asian population group in the United States, yet most studies have used quantitative methods. As of now, qualitative studies applying life story analysis to identity are rare. A recent doctoral dissertation by Cheung (2014) investigated the life stories of twelve Chinese female immigrants aged 22 to 51 and their gender role identity development. Studies on life stories and the identity of Hispanic youth have not been found.

D. Identity in Life Stories of Korean Americans

Two studies have related identity to life stories of Koreans in the United States (Kang, 2004; Kang & Lo, 2005). One study included a few Korean Americans in exploring the ethnic identity of 1.5- and second-generation Asian American professionals through their autobiographical essays (Min & Kim, 2000). These three studies appear to constitute the entirety of published accounts of Korean American identity using a narrative approach.
Kang (2004) studied the ethnic identity of Korean cultural camp counselors in the northern California Bay Area. A total of 30 volunteer camp counselors from 17 to 25 years old participated in the study. Their meeting sessions were video-recorded and analyzed to investigate how Korean American camp counselors categorized themselves in discourse and how this was linked to the construction of their Korean ethnic identity. Ethnic “self-categorization” (p. 225)—which was salient among camp counselors—was defined as the identification of one’s ethnic identity. Korean camps are a place to teach Korean American youth about Korean cultural heritage, tradition, history, and language, aspects of life that promote an ethnic unity. Camp counselors identified themselves in three different ways: “more American,” “more Korean American,” or “more Korean.” The counselors’ debates on teaching Korean heritage or the mentorship of the campers displayed their conflicting ideologies of ethnic identity. This investigation explained the Korean counselors’ process of ethnic identity construction. They attributed various meanings to the term, “Korean,” depending on the context in which the camp counselors’ linguistic practices occurred. Counselors’ sense of ethnic identity was constructed through the practice of self-categorization and was associated with different individual ideologies of ethnic identity. The finding challenges the idea of a singular ethnic identity that corresponds with one ethnic category (Kang, 2004).

The implications of the study are twofold. First, the meaning of ethnic identity among the Korean counselors varied depending on the contexts in which they used the term. So, studying ethnic identity in Korean Americans requires studying individual contexts. Second, the meaning of Korean can be different from one conversation to another. Thus, Korean American identity can be understood in linguistic practices as they relate to each person’s unique story.
Kang and Lo (2005) investigated narratives of Korean Americans in an attempt to understand two different ways of self-positioning—“discursive positionings” (p. 95)—as Asian Americans or Korean Americans. The term, Asian Americans, refers to a racial classification that people outside of this racial category typically make. On the other hand, Korean Americans refers to an ethnic identification under the Asian category. Asians is an “others-imposed racial label,” whereas Koreans is a “self-imposed ethnic option” (p. 94). To untangle the ways in which Korean Americans orient themselves with regard to identity labels, they interviewed 18 Korean American youth aged from late teens to 20s. The interviewees were a mixed group from U.S.-born second-generation youth to those who had recently immigrated. The study’s overarching assumption was that Korea is a single ethnic community, so the tension among Korean Americans between being a Korean as an ethnic category versus being called an Asian as a racial grouping should tell us something important about the identity of this population.

The study illustrated that the Korean participants’ use of the term “Koreanized” had two significances. One significance was a self-ascribed identity, which was voluntarily chosen and changeable across the life course—“discourse of agency” (p. 95). The other way was to denote the fixed and unchanging attributes of identity—“discourse of dispositions” (p. 95). The participants demonstrated that the perception of identity could be changeable through active negotiation between participants. Overall, Korean American narratives indicated that they had different ideologies about the fixed nature of identity within the Korean American community. The self-ascribed ethnic options (“Korean”) and other-imposed racial labels (“Asian”) were not necessarily linked to one another. Instead, these two terms were found to work independently manifesting a dynamic process of identity reconfiguration that depended on each Korean American participant’s time of immigration and life experiences (Kang & Lo, 2005). The authors
introduced a new approach to identity studies by presenting two categories of identity discourse. Thus, the investigation of the dynamic nature of identity configuration in each Korean American youth deserves more attention.

Min and Kim (2000) explored the ethnic identity of 1.5- and second-generation Asian American professionals—including a few Korean Americans—through their autobiographical essays. The number of Korean participants was not specified in the study. A total of 15 Asian American professionals provided essays reporting on their lives and the issues they had faced while growing up as Asian Americans. The age range of the participants was from early 20s to late 40s. A majority were in their 30s. Twelve were born in the United States or came to the U.S. when they were young. The remaining three participants came to the United States after they had graduated from high schools in their own country. The participants represented seven ethnic groups: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Indian, and Bangladeshis. The majority were graduates from prestigious universities in the United States and had professional occupations such as a medical doctor, lawyer, college professor, comptroller in a small private college, and social worker. Two-thirds of the participants were females.

The study found that many of the Asian American professionals had strong bicultural orientations, a finding that disproved classical assimilation theory. In classical assimilation theory (Gordon, 1964), highly-educated Asian Americans are thought to be well acculturated into the mainstream society and culture. In the meantime, these professionals are unlikely to retain their original ethnic identity. In contrast, the study showed that Asian American participants successfully assimilated into the mainstream society without losing awareness of their ethnic background. Most had close relationships with white friends and had a strong sense of their ethnicity at the same time. However, they reported that they had tried to hide their ethnic
background during early school years, which was a somewhat painful experience. Yet, their ability to live openly in their ethnic identities gradually improved through their school years. The college years seemed to be the time period when most participants developed strong and stable senses of ethnic identities. Some Asian American participants expressed pan-Asian identity without feeling limited by their ethnicity (Min & Kim, 2000).

This study provides us with useful information regarding the ethnic identity of highly educated Asian Americans. Yet its small sample size and reliance on essays limits any interpretation of the results. Unfortunately, how many Korean Americans participated in the study is unknown. Thus, more studies on the identities of Korean Americans seem necessary.

**E. A Summary of Research on Korean American Identity**

The limited research on the identity of Koreans in the United States has shown a few commonalities. First, the majority of research, which, despite limitations in its depth, has helped us understand the general characteristics of the Korean American population, employed quantitative data analysis techniques (Atkinson & Kim, 1989; Lee, 2005; Lee et al., 2001; Park, 2007; Shrake & Lee, 2004).

Second, the studies viewed identity as a predictor or an outcome variable in association with other variables. Identity was, often, viewed as a subcategory of acculturation. For example, in Atkinson and Gim’s (1989) study, the cultural identity—as a way to understand participants’ level of the U.S. cultural adaptation—of participants was used as a predictor of seeking professional mental health help. Shrake and Rhee (2004) studied the ethnic identity of Korean American high school students as a way to explain problem behaviors at schools. For the most part, identity has been studied as an undifferentiated construct that exists outside of ethnic, racial, national, personal, or social identities.
Third, in qualitative studies on Asian American identity, a small number of Koreans have been included in multiple ethnic group comparisons. Sometimes, the number of Korean participants went unspecified. For example, Min and Kim (2000) report that they analyzed the autobiographical essays of 15 Asian Americans including a few Korean Americans. The studies using the small number of Korean Americans have provided little information about their Korean American identity.

Fourth, studies have glossed over the social and cultural context in which Korean Americans find themselves. Kibria (1997) noted that Korean Americans and Chinese Americans associated their ethnic identities with life experiences such as the history of family immigration to the United States. What are crucial are the social, cultural, and contextual influences on the development of identity in Korean Americans.

Finally, each Korean American’s identity reflects their broad spectrum of life experiences including small and big “turning-points” (McLean & Pratt, 2006, p. 714) in life. This study attempts to bridge gaps in the Korean American identity literature by detailing the life stories of Korean youth in the United States.

F. The Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the identity of Korean American young adults through their life experiences in New York City. The theoretical framework that identity practices are situated in personal narratives served as the base for the design and analysis of this dissertation. The rationale of this research started from a recognition that no previous studies have looked at the identity of Korean youth living in the United States through their life stories. I wanted to listen to the experiences of Korean American youth, their thoughts and ideas about
their lives through their voices. As such, I expected this study would yield a deeper understanding of narratives of Korean Americans and their identity.

To do this, ten second-generation Korean young adults in their twenties were invited to participate in the study. I employed a qualitative methodology to examine participants’ subjective life experiences in the United States and the development of their identity in the process. I used McAdams’ life story model with its analytic schemes. Ethnographic techniques were also used in interviews and analyses to interpret the participants’ explicit and implicit expressions of Korean-ness. As numerous scholars recommend, using ethnographic methods can capture culture-specific meanings of language use (Cortazzi, 2001; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008; Miller, Fung, & Mintz, 1996; Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu, & Mosier, 1993).

The main purpose of the study did not lie in its generalization of results to the larger Korean population in the United States. Rather, this study would provide an improved understanding of identity issues among Korean American, young adults through their own voices. Therefore, an in-depth exploration into the lives of research participants was of critical importance. No studies have previously looked at the lives of Korean American young adults using this conceptual and methodological framework.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

A. Introduction

This study used qualitative methods to examine participants’ subjective and objective life experiences in the United States. Because the purpose of this study is to explore the identity of Korean American young adults through their life experiences in the United States, ten second-generation Koreans in their late teens to twenties were recruited for the study. A primary focus was on the development of identity. To explore the identity of the Korean youth in the U.S. I have four overarching research questions: (1) What do individual life stories of Korean youth in New York City tell us about their identity; (2) How do their perceptions of ethnic identity relate to their life stories; (3) What are the meanings of “being a Korean” or “Korean-ness” in their everyday discourses; and (4) How do Koreans in the United States use societal images of Koreans to describe their life stories and those of Korean friends?

1. Life story analysis and narrative ethnography. McAdams’ life story model was used to elicit participant narratives. All recorded interviews were transcribed. I interpreted the interviews in their specific Korean cultural context by applying the concept of narrative ethnography. Gubrium and Holstein (2008) introduced the emergent method, which refers to “the ethnographic study of narrativity ... a method of procedure and analysis aimed at close scrutiny of social situations, their actors, and actions in relation to narratives” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008, p. 250). I used it to investigate the explicit and implicit ways in which participants express their Korean-ness. I borrow these research techniques to capture the culture-specific meanings of language use (Miller, Fung, & Mintz, 1996; Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu, & Mosier, 1993).
In line with the idea of narrative ethnography, my role as an investigator and as an insider and outsider was to capture Korean youth’s identity as reflected in their life stories. I am a Korean cultural insider but not fully since I was born and raised in South Korea and have spent most of my lifetime there. Korean is my native language. The youth I studied, in contrast, have spent most of, if not their entire, lifetime in the United States speaking English as their native language. Yet, for the most part the participants considered me a complete insider when I told them about my background. This helped them immediately relate to me and establish sufficient rapport to share their life stories from our first meeting, without any difficulty.

2. The use of grounded theory. I also used a methodology associated with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to extract codes from the life stories of participants. The research techniques suggested from grounded theory matched well with the life story model of identity in that both life story model and grounded theory methods require collecting and analyzing immense qualitative data, specifically collected using in-depth life story interviews. I applied grounded theory research techniques such as note-taking and coding themes in interviews and in their analysis throughout the whole study.

B. Research Participants

Ten Korean American young adults in their late teens to late twenties participated in the study. Five were men and five women. They all met the three criteria to participate in the study. First, they were born in the United States or came to the United States when they were under the age of six. Seven of them were born in the United States, two were born in South Korea, and one was born in Argentina. Second, both their biological parents are Koreans. Third, they are primarily English speakers who understand the Korean language and culture. Eight participants were recruited through a personal connection to a Korean Presbyterian Church in Maspeth,
Queens, New York. Two participants were recruited through an advertisement on a Korean community website.

I followed Marshall’s (1996) and Patton’s (2002) recommendations regarding sample size. Marshall (1996) points out that a qualitative study requires a practical and flexible approach to sampling that depends on the research questions. He argues that an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is determined by the number of participants required to answer the study questions adequately. Patton (2002, pp. 242-243) adds, “There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources.” To answer my research questions, I thought that ten research participants was an appropriate number. Also, I wanted to have an equal number of men and women participants as I thought men and women may have differences. I wanted to be open to any possibilities. Each participant was paid $20 for travel expenses.

**Demographic information.** The Korean youth participant ages ranged from 18 years to 29 years. The average age of the participants was 22.8 years ($SD = 3.52$). Seven of the participants were citizens born in the United States. Two were born in South Korea but came to the U.S. when they were under six years old, and they had not acquired U.S. citizenship yet. One youth was born in Argentina and had Argentine citizenship but came to the United States when he was two years old. Eight of the youth were members of the same youth group from a Korean Presbyterian church in Queens, New York, and the remaining two were not church attenders. Eight of the youth were raised in Queens, one was raised in New Jersey, and one was raised in Long Island, New York. All the youth were living in New York or New Jersey at the time of the interview. Seven were living in Queens, New York; one youth was living in Manhattan; one in
Long Island; and one was living in New Jersey but spent her work day in New York City. Three women graduated from four-year colleges, and one man graduated from a community college; the remaining two women and three men were college students; and one man did not finish a community college degree. In terms of occupation, besides the five college students (two women and three men), three women had full-time jobs, one man was self-employed, and one man was working part-time. They were all single. Eight of the youth were Protestant Christians, one was an atheist, and one was not a church-goer, but she reported that she was a Christian. All used English as their primary language. Their fluency in Korean varied from low conversation level to high level verbal and written fluency. All reported that Korean was used at home while they were growing up. The youth’s food preferences were varied, but the majority of the youth reported that they liked Korean food. It was a relatively homogeneous sample.

The parents of the youth were all immigrants. Nineteen of twenty parents were born and raised in South Korea but immigrated to the United States when they were adults, mostly in their late twenties to thirties. One parent, the father of a woman (F4) respondent, came to the United States when he was young, so he was bilingual in English and Korean. Ten parents out of twenty had U.S. citizenship. The education level of the parents was diverse. Six parents were college graduates; two were community college graduates; seven were high school graduates; two were middle-school graduates. The mother and father of one man (M5) had doctorates. One parent attended some college. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the Korean youth who participated in the study (for further demographic information, see Appendix B). Each participant’s demographic profile is presented at the end of the chapter.
Table 1.
A Summary of the Demographics of the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Residency in the U.S.</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country/Place of Birth</th>
<th>Region Currently Living in</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Primary Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice (F1)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>NYC (Manhattan)</td>
<td>College Student</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isabella (F2)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Queens, NY</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy (F3)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Queens, NY</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily (F4)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Queens, NY</td>
<td>College Student</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyce (F5)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason (M1)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Queens, NY</td>
<td>Associates of Science</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph (M2)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Seoul, South Korea</td>
<td>Queens, NY</td>
<td>College (did not finish)</td>
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<tr>
<td>David (M3)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Queens, NY</td>
<td>College (Sophomore)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethan (M4)</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>Queens, NY</td>
<td>College (Freshman)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeremiah (M5)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Great Neck, NY</td>
<td>College (Sophomore)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. Methods and Procedures of Data Collection

1. McAdams’ (1995) life story interview protocol. This study used McAdams’ life story interview protocol with slight modifications. The interview protocol consisted of eight sections. The first section was about life chapters. Participants outlined and described in about 20 to 25 minutes the main chapters of their life stories. In part two of the interview, interviewees shared critical life experience events such as peak and nadir experiences, turning points, earliest memories, important childhood, adolescent, and adult scenes, and other defining moments. Some participants, because of their age, were unable to offer information about adult scenes. For example, participants who were younger than twenty felt that they were too young to have had important adult events. In the third section of the interview, interviewees described the single greatest challenge that they had ever faced. The fourth section was about positive and negative influences on life stories. They described a single person, group of persons, or organization/institution that had had the greatest positive and negative influences on their stories. The fifth section was about stories that had affected their life stories. The participants were asked to identify (1) television shows or movies, (2) books or magazines, and (3) family or friend’s stories that had influenced their life stories. The sixth section was about alternative futures. I asked interviewees to describe both a positive and a negative future, that is, I expected them to speak about their goals and dreams and things they wanted to avoid in the future. The seventh section was about personal ideology and the eighth was about life themes.

2. An initial contact. I made initial contact with two Korean American young adults, Alice and Jason, in March 2015. The meeting explored the feasibility of the study by delving into the interests of the potential participants regarding the theme of the study. About one and a half hours were spent in the meeting. At the start, I briefly described the study and listened to them
describe their interests and willingness to participate. It was also an opportunity to determine whether they could help recruit future interviewees through their connections. The entire meeting was recorded and transcribed later for analysis. To record the interview, I used an iPhone application, Voice Record Pro version 2.7 (Dayana Networks Ltd., 2015).

3. Pilot interviews. The two Korean American youth participated individually in pilot interviews two weeks after the initial contact. The pilot interviews were to test the adequacy of the interview protocol and to determine an appropriate time and length for each interview. I slightly modified the original version of McAdams’ (1995) life story interview protocol to make the Korean youth interview protocol appropriate for the study. During the first session with each participant, the first half of the life story interview was completed in about one and a half to two hours with a 10-minute break. A follow-up interview to complete the second half of the life story interview was set up at the end of each first meeting.

With a successful first session, two weeks later I met with each interviewee for a second life story session. The second half of the life story interview took about one and a half to two hours with a 10-minute break. The four interviews were conducted in approximately eight hours. All pilot interview sessions were recorded using Voice Record Pro, version 2.7, and were transcribed later sentence by sentence for analysis.

All interview sessions were conducted in English as the research participants used English as their primary language. My first two interviewees were bilingual in English and Korean but had much greater English than Korean proficiency. They used Korean words from time to time when they needed to deliver specific meanings. Alice could barely speak Korean, whereas Jason spoke Korean better. Growing up with their parents speaking Korean they understood Korean words and sentences well.
4. Recruitment. Upon the approval of my IRB application, I went on to recruit eight additional research participants. Six participants were recruited through my personal connection to a Korean Presbyterian church in Queens, New York. The other two participants were recruited by posting a notice on a website for the Korean community in New York. Four weeks after I posted the notice, I was able to contact the two participants and to schedule interviews. Participants met the following criteria: (1) They were born in or came to the United States before the age of six. (2) Both of their parents are Koreans. (3) They speak English as their primary language but at the very least they have some understanding of Korean language and culture. (4) Their ages range from late teens to late twenties.

5. Interviews. The two earliest interviews were conducted in March 2015. The other eight interviews were held from November to December 2015. Each participant had two interview sessions, and each interview session lasted for 90 minutes to two hours. At the start, each participant received an informed consent form. With consent, each participant was asked to fill out the demographic survey form for the study (see Appendix B) and to answer the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) (Phinney & Ong, 2007; see Appendix C). I administered the MEIM-R to investigate how a quantitative identity measure was related to the qualitative data of personal life story narratives. Herrington (2014) has shown that the MEIM-R produces greater reliability than the original MEIM measure. Thus I expected to find features of identity measure that would provide additional information for the analysis of personal narratives.

Shortly after the survey, I interviewed each participant using the Korean youth life story interview protocol (see Appendix A). The Korean youth life story interview protocol is a slightly modified version of McAdams’ (1995) life story interview protocol. Having tested the adequacy of the interview questions through two pilot interviews, I proceeded with the eight interviews
using the protocol without any further difficulty. All interviews were conducted in English as all
the participants were either native English speakers or complete bilinguals. Whenever needed,
the participants used Korean words to express their meanings within Korean culture. The
interviews were conducted through two 90-minute to two-hour interview meeting sessions.

6. Transcribing. The transcriptions were produced from November to December in 2015,
shortly after each interview was completed. I transcribed all the interviews myself. I spent about
20 hours transcribing each interview. Each interview generated 11 to 37 transcript pages, a total
of 253 pages. Some youth were talkative, sharing many episodes, while others spoke little,
describing fewer episodes. Age of participant and their personality characteristics affected
interview lengths. In general, the younger men with introverted personalities talked less.

At the beginning of the transcribing process, each participant received a pseudonym and
numeric code to be used in the analysis and presentation of results. While transcribing, the first
rule I tried to observe was to write down word for word and sentence by sentence following as
closely as possible the way the participants expressed themselves. I intended to capture these
Korean youth’s original way of expression, and understanding of words, and their nuance or tone
of voice. In cases where they used Korean words and expressions, I transcribed them in both
Korean and English.

D. Data Analyses

Data analyses for this study followed McAdams’ life story model and other discourse
theories. McAdams defines a life story as an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that
expected that as the life story interview protocol was laid out chronologically, each participant’s
life story analysis would provide a picture of identity formation’s developmental trajectory. The
other important aspect of a life story that forms part of the analysis is its psychosocial and cultural construction (McAdams, 1996). A life story that an individual constructs has its interpretative meaning within a specific culture. Similarly, discourse theories suggest that when an individual is involved in social cultural interactions identities are practiced in multiple ways (Daiute, 2004; Korobov & Bamberg, 2004). In keeping with these ideas, the overarching rule of analysis was to uncover the identity of the Korean youth participants as being closely linked to their Korean cultural heritage and life styles in the United States.

1. Coding procedure. The coding was performed in four steps. The first step was to read all interview transcripts several times. The repeated reading ensured two things: First, I wanted to figure out the adequacy of my initial coding themes. Second, I was open to the possibility of finding new coding themes. I anticipated discovering new coding themes that were salient and common across all the interview transcripts. This process was labor intensive due to the cyclical and sporadic nature of narrative discourses. I had to go back and forth from sentences to sentences, paragraphs to paragraphs multiple times to discern the meanings they intended to convey. As a consequence of repeated reading and note-taking, my coding themes were reorganized to combine the initial themes and those that emerged from the data. The second step was to create Excel spreadsheets for each coding theme and each interview transcript. In the next step, I rearranged each life episode under the corresponding theme for each interview transcript. The final step was to categorize each life episode under the same coding theme across all the interview transcripts for a fine grained coding and analysis (see Appendix D for a sample coding sheet).

2. Inter-rater agreement. To calculate inter-rater agreement, I (coder A) had an independent coder (coder B) code two youth interview transcripts, 20% of the study’s transcripts.
Coder B, a Korean researcher with a Ph.D., shared my ethnic background. Coder A (myself) sent my coding system and two transcripts (transcripts for one man and one woman) to coder B by email and had a phone conversation to discuss how the categories and subcategories were generated. To create a common understanding about the coding system, we clarified our thoughts and resolved possible disagreements about each category with examples. Then, coder B independently coded the transcripts. Two weeks later I (coder A) received the coding results from the coder B.

I created an excel file to calculate the percentage agreement between the two coders. Depending on the degree of agreement, different percentage agreement was given to that corresponding coding category. For example, if the two coders assigned the same key sentences or paragraphs from the transcripts to the same coding category, I considered it as a clear evidence that the two coders completely agreed on the coding category. Thus, a 100% agreement was given for that category. If there were numerous episodes for one category or subcategory, I calculated the number of episodes that showed agreement between the two coders. For instance, if the two coders agreed on three out of four episodes for that coding category, the category received a 75% agreement. In this way, I calculated the percentage agreement between the two coders for each of coding category and subcategory. Then, the percentage agreement for all the eight coding categories and subcategories was calculated by calculating the mean percentage agreement. The mean percentage agreement between the two coders was 96% for the female transcript and 93% for the male transcript. Thus, the total percentage agreement between the two coders, on average, was 94%.
E. Coding Categories and Subcategories

Below are the eight different coding categories used in data coding and analysis: (1) the theme of agency-oriented or communion-oriented life style, (2) the two different discourses of identity—disposition-related discourses versus observable action-related discourses, (3) neighborhood and cultural adaptation, (4) family relations and experiences, (5) friends, school, and Korean church network, (6) ethnic behaviors and practices, (7) changes in identity perception: Korean or American or both?, and (8) prejudices and discrimination. The eight categories with subcategories are summarized in Figure 1. These themes stood out in the life story narratives of the Korean youth and were used to capture as comprehensively as possible their perception of Korean American identity.

Figure 1.

A Map of Coding Categories
1. **Theme of agency and communion.** The first coding category was to explore whether the Korean youth life stories reflect the tension between the notion of agency and communion in accordance with McAdams’s (2002) analytic scheme. Since Bakan (1966) presented the concepts of agency and communion, numerous scholars have advocated the two as axial themes in life narratives (McAdams, 1985; McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996). “The two are fundamental modalities in the existence of living forms. Agency refers to the existence of an organism as an individual whereas communion refers to the participation of the individual in some larger organism of which the individual is a part” (Bakan, 1966, pp.14-15; quoted in McAdams, 2002, p. 1). In line with these ideas, McAdams (2002) points out that the salience of agency and communion themes in each person’s life story is what makes each life story distinctive, and the differences between the themes are measurable.

McAdams’ (2002) coding scheme for agency and communion was considered particularly interesting in that this may be where Korean collectivistic values and American individualistic values largely conflict. In other words, the term, agency was considered to represent the characteristics of the person who is goal and achievement-oriented, whereas the term “communion” was considered to represent the characteristics of the person who is relationship- and family-oriented. I considered this coding theme crucial because it explains whether their life styles were consonant with Korean collectivistic culture and value-oriented norms or American individualistic culture and value-oriented norms (Jones et al., 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). In addition, because the study’s research participants were young adults, whether they were achievement-oriented or relationship-oriented was thought to be a critical factor that would explain their life styles from a developmental point of view.
Below are sub-themes of agency and communion with some examples of each. Under the agency theme, there are four sub-categories: (1) Self-Mastery (SM), (2) Status/Victory (SV), (3) Achievement/Responsibility (AR), and (4) Empowerment (EM). Self-Mastery (SM) is the case when a person strives to successfully master, control, enlarge, or perfect the self. McAdams (2002) describes the three common expressions through which a person reports SM. They are insight, control, and power. McAdams (2002) writes:

A relatively common expression of the theme (SM) involves the protagonist’s attaining a dramatic insight into the meaning of his or her life...... Another relatively common expression of SM involves the protagonist’s experiencing a greatly enhanced sense of control over his or her destiny in the wake of an important event..... Other examples of SM typically show up in accounts in which the individual reports that he or she felt strengthened by an important event, or in which a person explicitly says that the experience provided him or her with a feeling of power (p.3).

Here are the examples of coding for SM in the interview transcripts of the Korean youth. One man reported that he was raised Buddhist but when he converted in his early twenties to Christianity, he was able to develop new insight into his life. This episode was coded as SM through insight and one point was given for his agency-oriented tendency. Another example of SM is that a woman reported that she was able to learn much about Korean culture after her dad’s sudden death and that it was a time for her to learn to become independent. This episode was coded as SM through control and one point was given for her agency-oriented tendency. The woman also reported an episode of SM through power in which she described that all the hardships she had gone through while growing up in an immigrant family made her a stronger person. This episode was coded for her agency-oriented life style.

Status/Victory (SV) was coded when a person attained heightened status or prestige among his or peers. For example, a participant reported that he was so happy when he found out he was accepted into an Ivy League college as the best student in his junior year of high school, and this improved his self-esteem. Achievement/Responsibility (AR) was coded when a person...
reported substantial success in the achievement of tasks or jobs. For example, a few participants reported that they were very happy when they were on a mission trip to Arizona with their church people to help Native Americans living there. Empowerment (EM) was coded when a person reported being enlarged, enhanced, empowered, or made better through association with someone or something larger and more powerful than the self. For example, several youth reported their religious experiences such as meeting God in person through church services or some special events at churches.

Under the communion theme, there are four sub-categories. They are (1) Love/Friendship (LF), (2) Dialogue (DG), (3) Caring/Help (CH), and (4) Unity/Togetherness (UT). Love/Friendship (LF) was coded when a person experienced an enhancement of erotic love or friendship toward another person. For example, a woman reported that she met her best friend, who is also Korean, when she first moved to New York, and she had helped her realize her Korean identity. Dialogue (DG) was coded when a person experienced a reciprocal form of communication or dialogue with another person or group of others. For example, a woman reported that she had a memorable conversation with her Latina friend at work. Her friend understands her identity as a unique, individual, which supersedes her cultural identity or her ethnic identity, and this friendship challenged her in terms of her identity struggle to be a part of this or that group. Caring/Help (CH) was coded when a person reported that he or she provides care, assistance, nurturance, help, or support for another. For instance, a few men reported that they had to work to provide for their families when their parents lost their jobs. Unity/Togetherness (UT) was coded when a person reported a feeling of being part of a larger community. For example, a man reported that when he first went to a Korean church, he could
feel so much closer to the kids there than any other friends at school, which made him feel more comfortable in that church setting with all Koreans.

2. Two types of identity discourse. Coding for two different types of discourses explored how Korean American youth see their Korean American identity. One discourse is a discourse of dispositions, whereas a second discourse is a discourse of agency. Kang and Lo (2005) point out that the two types of discourse signal an individual’s identity. That is, when a person’s identity is expressed using a discourse of dispositions, the person perceives his or her identity as a presupposed conception that is fixed, unchangeable, and determined at birth. In contrast, when a person’s identity uses a discourse of agency, the person understands his or her identity as chosen by free will manifested through voluntary behavior or cultural cues (Kang & Lo, 2005).

I searched for the verbal cues in the interview narratives that signal the use of one of these two discourses in their identity descriptions. For instance, when Korean youth used several specific verbs that expressed personal preferences and desires in association with their identity, these cases were identified as indicating a discourse of dispositions. On the other hand, the discourse of agency was identified when interviewees reported freely watching Korean TV, listening to K-pop music, or other their ethnic behavior. Looking for these verbal cues in the interview narratives was expected to provide pieces of information important to understanding youth’s identity perception. This was considered as a better approach than simply looking at their use of specific terms such as “Korean” vs. “Asian American” or “Americanized” vs. “Korean Korean” (Kang & Lo, 2005). I expected to delineate the heterogeneous identities of Korean American youth by analyzing the use of specific words that denote each category of discourse.
a. The discourse of dispositions. Kang and Lo (2005) highlight that the discourse of dispositions presupposes that identity is fixed and predetermined at birth. As such, identity is viewed as a categorical variable, such as an individual’s place of birth and accent that is inherent within a person. The discourse of dispositions accompanies specific forms of vocabulary words and expressions, as it focuses on personal preferences and desires. For example, the use of “want,” “esteem,” “like,” “feel,” “think,” and “prefer,” and other verbs of volition fell into the category of the discourse of dispositions. These words were interpreted as Korean youth expressions of states of mind, beliefs, and values as well as their positioning of themselves within the Korean American community. In this category, Korean youth described themselves as belonging to one group or the other such as either as Korean or as American but not as an Americanized Korean.

b. The discourse of agency. Kang and Lo (2005) argue that the discourse of agency presumes that identity is an issue of personal choice and easily modifiable depending on an individual’s practice of culture. Accordingly, a person’s identity is practiced in daily lives and constructed through what they choose to do. This category of discourse comes with the use of dynamic verbs that indicate action, activity, and temporary or changing conditions. For example, certain types of verbs that describe ethnic-oriented behaviors such as “watch,” “listen,” “wear,” or “talk” were identified as the discourse of agency. In this category, the Korean youth reported that their identity was related to their life experiences and daily practices, such as listening to Korean music, speaking Korean in public, watching Korean soap operas, and wearing certain kinds of clothes. Korean youth identity was investigated through a focus on music preferences, fashion, hair styles, TV programs, and other everyday forms of Korean culture consumption. Table 2 shows the two categories of discourses with examples of specific verbs.
Table 2.

Two Types of Identity Discourses (Kang & Lo, 2005, pp. 103-104)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of discourse</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Verb examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The discourse</td>
<td>(1) A person’s positioning within the Korean American community linked to states of mind, beliefs, and values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of dispositions</td>
<td>(2) Depicted as inherent and not readily changeable, like place of birth and accent</td>
<td>The use of verbs of volition that express preferences and desires: For example, “want,” “esteem,” “like,” “feel,” “think,” “guess,” “consider,” “understand,” “prefer,” etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Linked categories of identity to internal states of mind, dispositions, and comfort levels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Membership in a group is categorical not gradient; people are depicted as members of “one or the other” group not as “more Korean Korean” or “less Korean American.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discourse</td>
<td>(1) Linked to easily modifiable and observable practices</td>
<td>The use of dynamic verbs that indicate action and activity: For example, “watch,” “listen,” “wear,” “talk,” “speak,” “enjoy,” etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of agency</td>
<td>(2) Link categories of identity to observable practices, such as listening to Korean music, speaking Korean in public, watching Korean soap operas, and wearing certain kinds of clothes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Identity is under the control of an individual.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Focuses on the everyday consumption of popular culture, in the form of music, clothes, hair, dress, and television.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Neighborhood and cultural adaptation**. The importance of Korean youth’s neighborhood while growing up stood out across the interview transcripts and was included as a context for identity development. Three subcategories emerged under this coding theme: (1) I explored whether the youth grew up in Flushing, Queens around the large Korean community in New York or in a predominantly White neighborhood. (2) I looked for their feelings about their neighborhoods and mobility that influenced their degree of intercultural or intracultural contact. (3) I coded what they thought about their ability to adapt as a child from an immigrant family.

4. **Family relations and experiences**. Family was included as an important context in which Korean youth could practice their identity. I had three subcategories under family
experiences: (1) I explored how the Korean youth thought about their parent-child relationship within Korean culture. I wanted to explore their thoughts on Korean parenting. (2) I coded episodes of value conflict between Korean parents and American children. While reading the transcripts, I noticed many of the youth had experienced value conflict with their parents. (3) I investigated how youth feel about the responsibility of supporting their families and aiding elderly parents, which is a value-commitment common in Korean culture.

5. Friends, school, and Korean church network. Coding for friends, school, and Korean church networks included five sub-categories: (1) sharing bicultural experiences and expectations as Korean Americans with other Korean Americans; (2) influence of having multicultural friends, i.e., Asian (non-Korean), Hispanic, Black, and White friends; (3) important school experiences; (4) Korean church experiences such as Korean church support or church people networking. Due to sample characteristics, Korean church support was one of the most frequently reported subcategories.

6. Ethnic behaviors and practices. The code of ethnic behaviors and practices was included to indicate youth perceptions of ethnic identity. According to Phinney and Ong (2007), an individual goes through two processes of exploration and commitment to achieve his or her identity. Ethnic behaviors or practices are an exploration process. Thus I asked whether coding for Korean youth’s ethnic behavior and practices would reveal important features of identity development. I directly looked at understanding, awareness, and retention of Korean cultural heritage, tradition, history, and language. The coding theme includes five sub-categories: (1) efforts to learn Korean history, traditions, and customs, (2) understanding and retaining Korean values, manners, and uniquely Korean things, (3) efforts to learn Korean language and the level
of fluency in it, (4) South Korean visits and related experiences, whether positive or negative, (5) interest in Korean mass media culture and its consumption, and (6) preferences for Korean food.

7. Changes in identity perception: Korean or American or both? The developmental aspect of identity formation is one of the major research questions of this study. Accordingly, the first focal point in the process of coding and analysis was to make sure how each participant’s life story reflected their realization of their ethnic identity as a Korean living in the United States and how that perception of identity evolved over time. Thus I expected that each Korean youth’s life story would provide a picture of a developmental trajectory of identity formation. This was possible because I structured the interviews to generate a narrative in chronological order. Therefore, the coding for this theme was to capture perceptions of identity changes over time. As such, each participant’s life episode and experience happened in a specific life timeline that corresponded to a developmental trajectory of ethnic identity. This was also analyzed in connection with later life episodes and experiences to see the impact of earlier experiences on later ones. I investigated how each Korean youth’s life episodes were associated with their later developmental identity outcomes.

8. Prejudices and discrimination. The issue of prejudice and discrimination stood out across the transcripts. Several participants reported racial prejudice and discrimination-related episodes in their life stories, and the episodes were frequently related to their perceptions of identity. Thus, I expected this coding theme would provide an important piece of information about participants’ realization of identity. I had seven subcategories for the code of prejudices and discrimination: (1) Model minority stereotype as a pressure, (2) stereotypes toward Asians in the United States, (3) racism or bullying experiences, (4) thoughts on societal images of Koreans
in the United States, (5) racism among Koreans, (6) the use of racial and ethnic labels or epithet-related experiences, and (7) pride in being Korean Americans.

**Examples of ethnic identity labels.** Kang and Lo’s study (2005) reports that there were several frequently used ethnic identity labels within the Korean community. These include “Americanized,” “super-Americanized,” “white-washed,” “banana,” “twinkie,” “Korean Korean,” “Koreanized,” “Westernized,” “Korean-washed,” “fob,” i.e., fresh off the boat, “1.5 generation,” and “second generation.” Korean youth’s experiences using these terms or any specific experiences related to them were thought to provide an important aspect of their identity. For example, Korean Americans who do not spend much time with other Korean Americans often do not know some of the terms or do not have strong ideologies that such terms denote specific types of people (Kang & Lo, 2005). Thus I coded the type of ethnic identity labels Korean youth used in their narratives.

**F. Profiles of the Korean Youth Participants**

Below is a brief summary of each participant’s demographic profile. Each participant’s name is referred to by a pseudonym and given a code to ensure confidentiality. Women participants were coded as *F1, F2, F3, F4, and F5*. Men participants were coded as *M1, M2, M3, M4, and M5*.

1. **Alice (F1).** Alice was 22 years old when we met for the interview. She was attending a CUNY College where she was a senior majoring in psychology. An only child, she was born and raised in Queens, New York and spent most of her life in New York. Her parents were born and raised in South Korea, but they moved to the United States in their twenties and later acquired their U.S. citizenship. She currently lives with her mother in lower Manhattan. Her father suffered a fatal assault when he was pushed off a subway platform just as the train was coming
into the station. He fell to the track and was killed on the spot. This happened a few years ago and was shocking news to the Korean community in New York. Alice and her mom started working full-time after her father’s death to support themselves and their family. Alice is planning to go to a nursing school in New York City to become a nurse practitioner after graduating from college. She speaks English as her primary language with low fluency in Korean. She reports, however, that she understands Korean better than she speaks it because her parents spoke Korean at home while she was growing up. She reported having interest in diverse racial and ethnic groups of people and their culture and related that she is more interested in American than Korean culture. She likes to travel and would like to explore different parts of the world. A reason for working full-time was to earn travel expenses for the summer. She is bright and outgoing and showed a lot of interest in the study.

2. Isabella (F2). Isabella, 23 at the time of the interview, was born in New Jersey and has lived in Long Island, New York. She graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in business administration from a college in Boston and has been working as an associate client analyst at a market research company. Her parents were born and raised in South Korea, but they immigrated to the United States when they were in their twenties. Both her parents are U.S. citizens. She was raised with strict Christian values and has regularly attended church since she was a young child. Her primary language is English, and she barely speaks Korean. She is particularly interested in helping and treating sick people and plans to go to medical school to become a psychiatrist. She is interested in the societal images of Asians in the United States and in the identity of Asian Americans, which is why she was willing to participate in the study.

3. Cindy (F3). Cindy was 24 years old when we met for the interview. She recently graduated from a SUNY college and has been working at a corporate level company in
Manhattan. Both her parents were born and raised in South Korea. Her mother came to the U.S. when she was young and later acquired U.S. citizenship, whereas her father came to the U.S. in his thirties and still does not have U.S. citizenship. Her parents were separated many years ago. She did not want to discuss the details of her parents’ separation in the interview. Cindy currently lives with her mother and grandparents in Queens, New York. She speaks and writes Korean well even though her primary language is English. Living with grandparents who do not speak English at all, she spoke only Korean at home. She reported struggling to understand her identity in terms of to which group she belongs, i.e., whether she is a Korean or an American. Her struggle is ongoing, which made her particularly interested in this study.

4. Lily (F4). Lily, 21 years old at the time of the interview, was born and raised in Queens, New York. She is a psychology student attending a SUNY College and wants to become a counselor after she graduates. She had visited Korea several times while she was growing up in the United States. Her latest visit to Korea, about which she had vivid memories, was this past summer. Lily is from a middle-class family and both her parents are college graduates. They immigrated to the United States in their late twenties and acquired U.S. citizenship many years ago. While growing up, her grandmother also lived with her family and taught her Korean language, culture, and manners. As both her parents had to work, her grandmother took care of her when she was a young child, which, she reported, influenced her identity formation.

5. Joyce (F5). Joyce was 25 years old when I met her. She was working as an art teacher at a kindergarten in Queens, New York. Born in South Korea, she and her family moved to Los Angeles when she was two years old. She and her family had to move back and forth from Korea to different parts of the United States several times until she was seven years old, when they finally settled down in New Jersey. She spent the most of her life in New Jersey until she went to
college in Brooklyn. She currently lives with her mother in New Jersey. She reported that she struggled with her identity while she was growing up. Her childhood and adolescence were particularly difficult for her because her parents did not get along and eventually divorced when she was a teenager. She believed that her parental issues encouraged her to contemplate who she was and what her life was going to be and had a big impact on her identity formation.

6. Jason (M1). Jason, 27 years old when the interview took place, was born and raised in Queens, New York. He graduated from a community college. He is self-employed, designing and selling clothes online. He used to have a lifelong dream of becoming a policeman, but he gave up on his dream several years ago when he was diagnosed with a herniated disk in his neck. At the time, both his parents had lost their jobs, the family’s financial situation had deteriorated, and he took a leave of absence from school and worked his job at a liquor store. Working many hours at the liquor store, he neglected caring for his injured neck. His doctor told him that working as a policeman could worsen the injury, and he might end up with severe pain in his neck for the rest of his life. He had to give up his dreams, and with no back up plan, he became depressed not knowing what to do. Now he has set up a new plan for his online business. Jason’s parents insisted he use only Korean at home, and as a result he speaks it well. He reported having a strong sense of being a Korean while recognizing his Americanized belief system and life style. He considered both his Korean ancestry and American identity equally important.

7. Joseph (M2). Joseph was 29 years old when we met for the study. The oldest among all the participants, he was born in Seoul, but he immigrated to the United States with his parents when he was six years old. He grew up in Queens, New York, but he does not have U.S. citizenship nor do his parents. He attended some college but dropped out and is now working part-time. He is struggling with his career path and future plans. Both of his parents were college
graduates. He reported, however, that his family had a lot of financial problems because his father neglected to support his family and stayed away from him and his mother for many years. His mother had to work, and he struggled growing up without a father figure. Having had to communicate with his mother in Korean at home, he speaks Korean and English well. He considered himself more Korean than American due to his mother’s influence.

8. David (M3). David was 18 years old when I met him. He was the youngest among all the participants. A sophomore at a CUNY college, he was born and raised in Queens, New York. He was majoring in psychology and was planning to go to graduate school to become a clinical psychologist. Both of his parents were born and raised in Korea and immigrated to the United States many years ago. They have still not acquired U.S. citizenship. David understands Korean better than he speaks it. He believes that his identity is more closely linked to being a Korean than an American due to his parents’ Korean language use at home and his close relationship with Korean friends from church. He considers his close connection through his parents and sister to the Korean community an influence on his strong Korean identity.

9. Ethan (M4). Ethan, 20 years old at the time of our interview, was born in Argentina but moved to the United States with his family when he was three years old. He has lived in Queens, New York for most of his life. He currently lives with his father and older brother. His mother passed away from breast cancer. He is a computer science student attending a CUNY college. He is an Argentine citizen who thinks of himself as a Korean living in the United States. He believes his identity struggle has something to do with his unique life story and status. He also expressed deep sorrow about the recent loss of his mother and spoke about the depression he has suffered since adolescence. He was only twelve when his mother was first diagnosed with breast cancer. She suffered from the cancer for seven years and passed away in the year that I
interviewed him. He reported that his whole family had to go through all the suffering associated with his mother’s illness and death. His father took responsibility for all family related, including financial support. Ethan often cried during the interview as he recalled the struggle he and his family went through.

10. Jeremiah (M5). Jeremiah was 19 years old when we met for the study. He is from a middle-class family; both his parents have doctoral degrees. He is an only child, so he has received all the love and attention from his parents while he was growing up. His dad ran his own company until several years ago when he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. Now his mother takes care of his father and provides for his family financially. Jeremiah reported that he was a smart student throughout high school and that he had been accepted to Cornell University. He was unable to go, however, because of his family’s financial situation. Instead of pursuing his dream of studying at an Ivy League school, he had to start working part-time to support his family. Now he is a nursing student attending a college on Long Island, and he is planning to be a nurse practitioner. Jeremiah reported that he had not struggled with his identity much. He believed that he struggled relatively less than his Korean friends probably because of his childhood experiences. During childhood, his parents encouraged him to do anything he wanted and to develop higher self-esteem. He considered his relative comfort with his identity related to his excellent academic performance in his junior and high school years. In the following chapter, I will discuss the study findings from the analysis of the life stories of these youth.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

In this chapter, which consists of two parts, we will look at the study findings. The first part presents findings from analyses of the life stories of the Korean youth with illustrative excerpts from the interview transcripts. The presentation of the results from the life story analysis follows my eight coding categories discussed in chapter 3. The second part presents findings from an assessment of the Korean youth’s ethnic identity using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Part I: Life Story Identity Analysis

Interviews generated over 250 pages of transcripts, which were analyzed using the eight coding categories discussed in chapter 3. The eight categories are: (1) theme of agency and communion; (2) two types of identity discourses; (3) neighborhood and cultural adaptation; (4) family relations and experiences; (5) friends, school, and Korean church network; (6) ethnic behaviors and practices; (7) changes in identity perception: Korean or American or both?; and (8) prejudices and discrimination.

Several of the participants expressed their gratitude for having the opportunity to participate in the study. Most reported that they had never shared their life stories. They stated that it was a good opportunity to reflect on what they had gone through and to share their experiences with someone who understands their culture. Lily (F4) noted:

This is one of the first times that I have only talked about myself. So it was kind of different, like out of my comfort zone because I never really talk about myself not that I’m ashamed or I have nothing to say but because that’s just always been my life, I never like it was the two different persons like talk about myself first. People say “why don’t you ever have anything to say that?” but it’s just like the way I am and this is the first time that I have talked about my life and my early childhood up to now, so it’s different. Not only it was good for experience, but I think it was good for myself to talk about myself because I never really do that.
A. Agency-Oriented vs. Communion-Oriented Identity Themes

The themes of agency and communion were chosen to explore whether the youth’s life experiences were Korean culture and value oriented or American culture and value oriented. Here, by American culture I mean mainstream, stereotypical individualistic culture (Jones et al., 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). I am interested, following McAdams’s (2002) analytic scheme, in whether Korean youth life stories reflect the tension between two different life styles. Thus, I wanted to see how the Korean youth life styles appeared through the lens of agency and communion. As presented in chapter 3, both agency and communion were analyzed in four subcategories each, eight subcategories in total.

1. Agency themes in life stories. McAdams (2002) notes that agency is exercised when the subject is relating “an important experience for the self, including the concepts of strength, power, expansion, mastery, control, dominance, autonomy, separation, and independence” (p. 3). To explore these ideas in people’s life episodes, the theme of agency is examined according to four subthemes: (1) Self-Mastery (SM), (2) Status/Victory (SV), (3) Achievement/Responsibility (AR), and (4) Empowerment (EM).

a. Self-Mastery (SM). Self-mastery (SM) includes “striving successfully to master, control, enlarge, or perfect the self” (p. 3). There are three common expressions encapsulate the theme of SM: insight, control, and power (McAdams, 2002). For interviewees the most common SM themes were expression of insight and control. The expression of power was rare; only one episode was related to the expression of power. That is, Alice (F1) commented that she had developed strength and resilience through the hardships she had confronted so far. She reported:

With resilience, I feel like I become a stronger person. I just want the most out of life and what would resilience also comes with hardships and if I didn’t go through such hardships I wouldn’t have no resilience but I think resilience is a main part of my life. Also, I think it a theme in a lot of immigrant families, the hardships are blessing in this guides to shape me into a stronger person. It’s like an American dream.
The topics representing SM themes varied, for example, moving to a different neighborhood, meeting critical life challenges, experiencing stereotypes toward Asians in the United States or while travelling in different parts of the world, conflicts with parents, or Korean church related experiences.

1. Self-Mastery (SM) through insight. Insight was the most common expression of self-mastery in the life stories of Korean youth. The Korean youth reported that they had experienced a big leap in their awareness of Korean American identity through important life experiences. They described multiple life episodes that represented the idea of self-mastery through insight.

The first group of episodes is related to big changes in their self-awareness of Korean or American identity. For example, Alice (F1) reported that her exposure to other races during her teenage years had a great impact on her identity formation. She developed an interest in exploring different parts of the world and culture due to her early intercultural contact. Here she said,

I guess my pre-teen years, I would describe that as exposure to other races. Now I just feel like exploring and wanting to meet more cultures, that’s why I like traveling so much…. I like talking to them. I feel like there is still so much more to explore about people. I just really like travelling. I like meeting people from different countries, that’s really awesome, and I just like the cultural experience. It’s like eye-opening.

Alice (F1) added that she had experienced even greater diversity during college years, which led her to make friends with people from different cultural backgrounds easily. As a result, she gratefully realized her American identity.

In college, I felt like my diversity range was even greater, and then I am also very thankful I turned out that way … College is a major factor into changing who you are and shaping the person you will be as an adult. But yeah, I don’t know, I just like can naturally talk to people despite their skin color, I can easily make a lot of friends.

Cindy (F3) and Ethan (M4) discussed episodes of self-mastery through insight in connection with their identity struggle. For example, Cindy (F3) reported that once she had
realized she could not fit seamlessly into the Korean group, she decided to find what her next group fit would be.

I don’t fit here, I don’t fit there. They don’t want me kind of thing, I think that was a moment where I kind of drew the line between all kids, ‘I am definitely not Korean, and now trying to find my ways to fit in the American society where I can best fit in, so I decided, ‘let’s forget about the racial wise, because it does not work black and white, so that was a moment I decided, ‘okay so Korean thing isn’t for me, so what’s my next plan?’ or ‘what’s my next group that I can fit into?’ so that was kind of I drew the line.

Ethan (M4) also reported that he had struggled with identity in middle school before he came to realize and accept that he was a Korean. He commented,

I guess it went more extreme for me towards middle school when I just realized “oh I am not like these guys, I am me.” My upbringing’s different, their upbringing’s different, there might be people similar to me but as a person, “this is who I am” like ‘why am I trying to pretend to be an all American or like White male? That’s not who I am” so that realization just … So, I kind of embraced the fact that I am Korean, no matter how much I try to run away, the blood in me is Korean, my parents are Korean, whether I was born in Korea or here or somewhere else, no matter like where I go, I will still be Korean, so I just kind of accepted that.

Lily (F4) had more strongly perceived her identity during high school. She reported that after she went through a lot in high school when she realized who she was as a person. Her description of self-mastery through insight was,

I guess when I was in high school, that’s when, in English we call it puberty, but I don’t think it has the same exact translation to say, 사춘기. I don’t think it’s like the exact translation, but I guess that was my turning point because I realized like I came to accept that kind of person that I am … So I guess after going through a lot in high school, that’s when I kind of got more accustomed to the person that I am.

David (M3) reported that there was a moment during high school years that he realized his Korean identity. It happened to him when he started going to a Korean church and he met many Korean friends. He reported a turning point when he realized his Korean identity. Here he commented,

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1 *Sa-Choon-Gi* is close to “puberty” in English. Those two words, however, have a subtle difference in their meanings. *Sa-Choon-Gi* refers to the emotional development that accompanies puberty and often results in feelings of rebellion and alienation. *Sa-Choon-Gi* lacks the Western sense in which puberty refers to physical changes.
In high school, I started going to a church and that’s where I found a lot of Korean friends who spoke, who embrace their Korean side and heritage, so through that I was able to kind of realize my Korean heritage myself and get better speaking Korean because I couldn’t speak Korean at all. That’s when I think I kind of realized that though I am an American-born citizen I still consider myself Korean as well... So I think that was my turning point.

The second group of episodes that represented the theme of self-mastery through insight was associated with the youth’s life struggles such as financial or family problems while growing up in immigrant families. For example, Alice (F1) discussed the changes in her thinking about being raised in an immigrant family. Growing up, she was envious of the luxurious life style of Americans as portrayed in the TV shows, but now she realizes that the person she is today was the result of being raised in a Korean immigrant family with many obstacles.

So like growing up I was watching stuff about California, wanting to be in California, I don’t know, that life style kind of envious to me ... I was striving for that life style though I knew it was never gonna happen at least with my parents because they are immigrant families ... but in retrospect, now I think about it, it is just not possible, yeah. It like kind of sucks, but at the same time, I feel like I am the person I am today because of the life style I was raised as from an Asian, Korean specifically immigrant parents ... It has given me a deeper meaning and new found vision in life and it’s like help me realized.

Joyce (F5) reported on the changes in her way of thinking about the things in life. After struggling in life, she realized that she and her family had survived and would be fine with another decade to come. She realized that worrying too much in advance was pointless. Now she was thankful for all the things that had happened to her and her family.

I’ve worried a lot, I’ve had a lot of issues like over-worrying, over-stressing, over-anxiety ... but I’m here now, and I’m okay and my family is okay, and somehow we survived everything we are here now, and I think being thankful for that ... I think even looking for the future when you look to the past, you see it was hard but we are here now and it’s okay, so in like ten years from now, it would be like “oh we made it another ten years and everything’s fine so we are here,” so being thankful for that.

Ethan (M4) talked about his mother’s death from breast cancer as an episode in which he experienced a self-mastery through insight. After his mother had passed away, he realized what to do in life:
Right after the New Year’s, my mom passed away. It was really tough because I was still working at that time, so was the rest of my family. It was such a big shock because I didn’t know how fast and how easy a person’s life could be taken away so fast … So that would have to be the biggest challenge, I am trying to get over that, I am trying to come to the fact that, accepting God.

The last group of episodes representing the theme of self-mastery through insight was related to life-changing religious experiences such as becoming a born-again Christian, setting up a new career path after finding God’s vision, and participating in church events such as a mission trip to an Arizona Indian reservation, etc. For instance, Isabella (F2) realized her new life vision while she was working as a client analyst at a market research company. When she came to understand what she really wanted to do with her life was to glorify God, she chose a new career path, psychiatry. Here is her comment:

My turning point is definitely me deciding to pursue psychiatry. I started working at this new job at the beginning in February and I came to a realization that the work that I was doing was pointless or meaningless like measuring the effectiveness of online advertising, so I am basically promoting people to spend more money … That’s not exactly glorifying God. Also just the whole idea of like, if I die, would it matter? So, I started thinking about what I wanted to do … I ultimately decided to go towards or pursue psychiatry right after weighing my pros and cons.

Joyce (F5) felt the moment she converted to Christianity as the biggest change in life. She believed that her faith was what defined her. She reported making a big leap in her self-understanding after becoming a Christian.

I think the biggest change is, now my main identity is like my faith and what I believe in, so I think that was the biggest change, prior to that, I think I was still similar to what I was like in my teens I think. When I accepted Jesus Christ as my savior, yeah I think that was the biggest change, it was literally like switch like turned on in my brain and it changed how I view not just myself but everything.

Joseph (M2) described the day he had come back to church after being away for a long time. He realized that he could find what he was looking for on that day. He considered it a turning point in his life.

That Sunday I went to church and that was a turning point. It was like a home. I was like the prodigal son in the bible … I think I was discovering who I am, identity itself. And
when I went back to church, I found out look that mirror found on myself, how to improve, what to work on, what to do myself just basically molding of it. You have the material, but you need to discipline to put your foundation into a buildup.

Joseph (M2) thought God’s intervention was why he was still alive. He spoke of cheating death several times. Through it all, he realized the grace of God and the meaning of his life:

I think I have probably cheated death like at least six times, I appreciate it as more but from what I have known, I cheated death six times, which is, once or twice is okay, but six times is like a coma, like death, that’s the divine intervention, that’s God. I believe that’s God’s unconditional love because he gives a gift and he shows mercy and we just feel his grace, for which I am very grateful.

David (M3) experienced an episode of self-mastery through insight when he was depressed not too long ago. Severely depressed one day, he thought about committing suicide, yet realizing it was against the principles of Christianity, he refused.

Around December, I think that’s when my depression went up a lot, it came to suicidal thoughts more than anything and there was one specific day where it was more serious than any other, and then I think I should really consider this like ending on the spot. But I didn’t because I thought, “that’s not the right way to go,” and also because since I believe in God, so suicide is, that’s not right because your life is a gift from God and throw it away, that would be meaningless.

Jeremiah (M5) shared one of his religious experiences while attending a youth group conference several years ago. He experienced the presence of God in the meeting and changed his perspective on God. He told me:

Beginning of my adolescence, when I first joined youth group, my mom sent me to Youth Hallelujah, it’s like a yearly revival for youth groups, so I guess that’s when I really found God in my life, so it was one of the best experiences … I felt like it opened up my eyes and opened up the perspective that God is real, so I felt like extreme happiness and contentment in my mind.

Isabella (F2) and Jason (M1) commented on their mission trip to an Arizona Indian reservation a few years ago. For Isabella (F2) it was a moment for her to realize how grateful she was for the simple things she enjoyed in life in New York.

My last mission trip to Arizona, it was basically two weeks that we were there and I just became open-minded or more aware of how blessed I am with the fact that I don’t live in the desert, so I don’t have to worry about water-running out like while we were there, for
a few days, we couldn’t take a shower for one day, and I was like, “oh no,” but it was also very humbling like realizing how blessed that I am that I was born in New York in the financial status that I am.

Jason (M1) felt a great happiness with his life when he saw how the Native Americans were living. Staying with them for a couple of weeks made him realize many precious things in life.

I think the reason why it helped me to realize my happiness is because people over there are suffering a lot, they have nothing. I think that would be the happiest moment in my life because I realized how much I have and just helping other people, it feels good ...We didn’t even really do much about speaking about God at all, but the Native Americans came to us and they wanted us to pray for them. I think that was amazing; to see them open up was so nice.

He also expressed his self-mastery through insight by talking about the changes in his religiosity. He changed over time in terms of the way he behaved in and outside of church. He realized that he should act the same way he did at church regardless of where he was and that his realization brought him a new attitude toward other people in his life.

As I grew older, I slowly realized I shouldn’t be acting differently outside of church, I should bring my church life and my church behavior to the outside world because that’s what I would think Christianity is all about … Just show them you care and you love them through your actions that you learn from Jesus Christ … So I think it really does help a lot … It really brings up my spirituality, so I don’t get stressed out too much or too tired living in the world.

David (M3) concurred. He now tries to live following his beliefs after accepting God.

I think as accepted Christian now, I think we just kind of learn to live kind of self-esteem, we just try to like love one others like no matter whom may be, even if in our opinion, they might not even deserve it, but we just love them no matter what because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ … I always believed there was a greater being, but I didn’t know if I chose to follow this higher power at first, but I mean now I do.

Ethan’s (M4) episode of self-mastery through insight, described below, focused on how he thought and felt, in light of his Christian faith, when he saw his peers were going astray in high school. He found himself grasping a different level of Christian faith, which made him think about how to behave as a Christian.
So when I looked at those friends of mine that just took the wrong turn, they started doing very questionable things as a Christian, it just kept me thinking ‘oh, I shouldn’t hang out with this type of crowd,’ but at the same time, you know they are my friends, I kind of worried for them … I grew up as a Christian, I always knew that childhood faith, God has my back, so he is always gonna point me to a right direction I have to choose. But it just made me think … Even though I still have faith, I could always take the wrong turn in any given time, so that was a real eye-opener towards the end of middle school.”

**ii. Self-Mastery (SM) through control.** McAdams (2002) identifies another common expression of SM in life stories as “the protagonist’s experiencing a greatly enhanced sense of control over his or her destiny in the wake of an important event such as divorce, death of a loved one, and reaching a life milestone” (p. 3). Several youth reported developing a sense of control over their lives when they encountered somewhat challenging life events. For example, Alice (F1) discussed how her dad’s sudden death affected her. She realized that she had to learn to be independent and to learn many things about her Korean heritage when her father passed away due to his accident.

My dad’s death impacted me a lot. Through this experience, I learned to be independent, more assertive because my mom is an immigrant, I had to take care of a lot of stuff. In that way, I learned a lot about myself like Korean cultural stuff. I feel like it was a time for me to learn to become independent because of that event.

Isabella (F2) discussed that while she was visiting Korea, she was able to develop an enhanced sense of control over her looks by sticking to her Christian value on looks and to refuse to get a plastic surgery for her eyes even though those around her insisted she do it. She commented that it was a critical moment for her realization of who she was.

When I studied abroad, two of my friends actually that I met in Korea, both of them got eye plastic surgery for their eyes. While I was there I was so shocked … but the fact that I truly believe God made me the way I am, I have no right to change it, so that was a highlight for myself being able to lean on God and stick with my refusal to get plastic surgery even though people around me that I personally knew were getting it and all these advertisements everywhere, and my own parents telling me to get it. It’s one of those defining moments kind of to realize who I am.

Several youth discussed the theme of self-mastery through control in relationship to their school experiences, for example, working hard to enter a good college or graduate from one,
confronting peer pressure, or leaving for college against parent objections. Isabella (F2) talked about her life during senior year in college where she had to work so hard. She was taking extra classes to graduate early while simultaneously doing several internships. She realized through it all that she had developed a great sense of control over her life.

Especially during college, I did three or four internships my last semester in college were so difficult, because I was taking all these classes and I was doing an internship in Boston, and I didn’t have a car. So, that was a very struggle, fast time in my life, so I guess that’s kind of like, that’s the accomplishment being able to go to school while essentially working at the same time working I guess part time but I was a student full time.

Jeremiah (M5) faced similar issues. During high school he had to study really hard because he wanted to go to a good school. He realized the high school years were the biggest challenge in life, but he got through it successfully. He developed a greater sense of control over his studying habit.

I was doing pretty good in middle school but I had to change my mindset and be able to, like motivate myself to do a lot harder, and I felt like that was the hardest challenge. Besides the homework time, I guess I spent two hours every day of studying yeah. I used to go to 학원, but I felt like it was very unnecessary, I felt like I would do it on my own without spending thousands of dollars, yeah so.

David (M3) reported that he experienced a greater sense of control when he did not follow what his friend asked him to do, such as fighting his peers from high school. He realized he did what was right.

I think it would be going on to high school also, because I was a bit with the wrong crowd in middle school, too. I think, my closest friend at the time, he did some questionable things. But then we stopped over a really bad reason because he like accused of me not wanting to fight anyone, and then, I said I didn’t want to fight anyone, and he said “if you didn’t fight, we are not friends,” and I said, “we are not friends.” So, I mean that was good because I was able to branch off.

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2 Hag-won is a private institution for learning English, math, science, music, art, or other special subjects. It is common in Korean culture for children to attend them after school.
Lily (F4) shared an episode of self-mastery through control, moving out from her family house to attend college on Long Island. She experienced a sense of control over her college life through that episode.

When I was looking for colleges, I wanted to just move out like no matter where I go. I thought I would be fine, but now that I look back upon it, I understand why parents were like that, but at the time, since high school I crashed a lot with my parents, so I was just really happy that I would be moving out and I was just so happy and self-absorbed into thinking that I was living and had freedom.

Cindy (F3) and Jason (M1) shared their experiences related to racism and stereotypes toward Asians. For instance, Cindy (F3) talked about when she encountered a hidden racism at work where she had to take over the other workers’ job assignment only because she was quiet and doing all her work in time without any complaints. She later discovered that people at work took advantage of her silence, which made her realize that she must fight against the hidden racism at work by explicitly expressing her opinion when needed. Through that, she developed a sense of control over her identity. Here is what she said:

This happened in one department and I remember I talked to someone in the other department, and they are like ‘oh everybody thinks that you are a quiet worker doing all this, they are like you are willing to carry it on for the team’ and I’m just like ‘no, I do my work diligently, that doesn’t mean I am quiet, I don’t complain or make vocal because there is nothing to complain about, but if you give me a reason to complain about, I am not gonna hide it.’ and I got more vocal and vocal and then the people start to think that I am feisty … I am quiet across trouble, but when things get to our hands, I will put my foot down, they can’t say anything because they know I am on to them, and anything else is the basis for racism.

Jason (M1) made efforts to develop better English skills to counter the stereotype that many Americans have toward Asians living in the United States. He did not want to become one of the Asians who do not speak English, thus he worked really hard to improve his English.

Some people take advantage of Asian people because we don’t speak English that well. But if you are well-spoken, properly express your feelings and thoughts, then they don’t ignore you, they take you seriously because they know you are educated person. I would have passion for English language because I was Asian, I didn’t want to become Asians who live in America but don’t know the culture, who refuse to learn English or refuse to
mingle with other groups of people … That’s why I went above beyond learning English, and expressing a lot, reading a lot, and writing a lot.

The other episodes of self-mastery through control included resisting drugs, learning how to behave not to be controlled by other people, and making efforts to learn about Korean culture and history after realizing Korean heritage. For example, Joseph (M2) commented that he developed a sense of control over drinking and he had never done drugs, even when he was lost in his twenties.

In my twenties, I was exploring, I was lost in church, and I was just playing around. But one thing I am really thankful about is I have never done drugs. Drugs, only that things I have done is probably alcohol. Till this day, I pretty much quit. I don’t drink as much.

Lily (F4) discussed life principles that were related to interacting with others. She realized that the way other people treated her influenced how she treated them. Thus, she believed that she had control over her life by treating others as they treated her.

I guess like I do realize that the way that I let people treat me kind of influences the way that my life goes, so I’m kind of like my personality is people pleasure, so for example, I would rather be somewhat early than making somebody wait, and that’s kind of the personality that I am. It was not really a good thing but I guess I do realize that the way people treat me like influences which way my life runs and then if they treat me poorly, then I try to kind of adjust to their level.

Jeremiah (M5) commented about what it meant to be a Korean and how he made efforts to learn and practice Korean culture and customs. He felt that he had developed a sense of control over his Korean identity.

There is a lot of problems with the living of a Korean but growing up in America and being able to learn the language, being able to read and write and everything. I tried to immerse myself in Korean culture a little bit, I listened to Korean music, K-pop, be able to learn a little, like overstepped the boundary a little bit and like explore like learn more about Korean culture and the history.

**b. Status/Victory (SV).** McAdams (2002) explains that the theme of status/victory (SV) is identified when “a protagonist reports attaining a heightened status or prestige among his or her peers” (p. 5). Status/victory was not a common theme in the life stories of the Korean youth.
Only two participants described SV episodes: Joyce (F5) and Jeremiah (M5). Both youth reported being accepted to a good school. Joyce (F5) mentioned,

I went to college in Brooklyn, and I was 18, I went to Pratt, it’s an art school. Pratt is very expensive, I got a half scholarship.

Jeremiah (M5) reported on his school grades during high school years and when he was accepted to Cornell University. It was a great achievement for him and his family.

When I became senior year, my grades were phenomenal, my dream college that I wanted to go to for a long time throughout my high school years was Cornell University, and once I applied for Cornell and got the answer back. I got accepted to Cornell, so both my parents were very happy about it being, they were like “oh my child is finally going to an Ivy League” which is the American dream I guess for Koreans especially.

c. Achievement/Responsibility (AR). McAdams (2002) identifies the theme of achievement/responsibility when “a person reports substantial success in the achievement of tasks or jobs” (p. 5). The theme of achievement/responsibility was expressed in the Korean youth’s life story narratives in connection with their experiences of participating in a mission trip with church people, going through a hard discipline to make a portfolio for college entrance, and getting training for public speaking. Two youth shared their mission trip episodes. For example, Jason (M1) reported on the work they had achieved:

Last summer, I went on missions’ trip to Arizona, the Native American reservation. It was my first time to go to in our church. We had different groups. Some people did painting, building houses for them, and another group of people helped clean houses that were recently caught on fire … Some people played with children. We also did community activities, sports, playing basketball, so people whoever want to come and play, we did like gift-card give-away, it was just kind of showing native Americans “there are still hope for you, we really wanna help you guys out.”

Isabella (F2) commented on the work she and her group had achieved:

One of the things that the pastor stressed a lot was building relationships not necessarily going out for the people, relationships with each other ... And then, the second part of the trip where you more interacting with the HOPI Native Americans that were there, and it was a great blessing, we got to just do outdoor work like painting or like fixing things which I really enjoy ... Also, I was able to talk to the HOPI people and they were just very open, they were like genuinely interested ... so it was very refreshing.
Joyce (F5) reported on her experience of prepping for college. She worked very hard during the senior year of high school when she was putting together a portfolio to apply for art school. She remembered it as the hardest work she had ever done:

When I was a senior in high school twelfth grade, I was preparing my portfolio for college, so I went to like this 학원 [hag-won, see footnote 2] and the teacher was really tough. I would go there right after school and stay there until sometimes 1 a.m. working. Yeah I remember doing that. It was very hard discipline, that’s like the hardest I worked in my life I think like ever.

Joseph (M2) won second place at a speech contest while he was living in Korea when he was young:

When I was in Korea, my father took me to a speech class, like public speech, I guess in my father’s eyes, I was very shy kid when I was younger, but because of that, I learned how to speak confidently in public. I remember I hated it but because of that, I was able to express who I was, I wasn’t afraid speaking in public, and when I was five, I went to this recital, speech contest and I won a second place.

d. Empowerment (EM). According to McAdams (2002), Empowerment (EM) refers to a life experience through which “a person is enlarged, enhanced, empowered, or made better through association with someone or something larger and more powerful than the self” (p. 7), for example, God, Korean church leaders, college professor, mentor, parents of the youth. Empowerment was a common theme from the Korean youth life stories. The most frequently reported empowerment episodes were related to the youth’s church experiences, parents of the youth, mentors from college, and meeting with Koreans who were socially or emotionally close.

The majority of the youth reported having had empowering experiences through having a personal relationship with God or developing close relationships with pastors, leaders, or friends at Korean church. For example, Isabella (F2) shared her experience of meeting God in person in high school. Since then, God has been her empowering agent:

I didn’t really understand who God was until 10th grade when I was in high school. I think that’s when I met God, I was going through very difficult time and at that moment, I just didn’t know who else to turn to, so I just started praying to God and all of a sudden, I felt this peace, at that moment I felt like even if everyone in the world abandons me,
God will not. So that’s how I was able to meet Jesus and then I became very involved at church.

Joyce (F5) also considered God as her source of empowerment:

I just try to be thankful for what I have and not worry, and try my best, I had a lot of anxiety in the past, but after becoming a believer, I have been better about anxiety and worrying. That’s a constant thing for me, try not to worry like praying, leaving things up to God, but now everything really revolves around faith and like even at work, I pray for my students, I pray for the other teachers, yeah. Doing what I can with what I have for God, but I think right now for me is just trying to be consistent in my faith.

Joseph (M2) expressed his feeling of empowerment by saying how God had been working in him through the years of his life struggle.

Also I think for me maybe it’s because I really believe God has been revealing him and show me to become a better person in a sense of what compassion and empathy and what love is … So I had to put foundation in God and it was just something needed to happen. That’s when I found out God is merciful and I am not afraid anymore.

Jeremiah (M5) discussed his high school years and the blessings he had received from God, who he believed was definitely a source of empowerment in every aspect of his life. He explained:

Especially during senior year I felt like God was really blessing me with so many opportunities and guiding me, because of that I felt like from all the scars I went through, throughout my high school years, he was able to heal them and I was able to learn a lot about … If it’s like a hard situation, I would look towards God and just pray about it. It definitely made me much nicer and then I would definitely not be as, I would never be angry, so I definitely feel like religion helped me with positively yeah. It’s a pretty big part of my life.

Many youth reported that church members, including pastors and elders, empowered them in times of difficulty. For instance, Alice (F1) considered her church pastor and church members empowering agents in her times of hardships, especially when her father suddenly passed away.

The reason why I went back to church was largely because of my dad when he passed away, the church helped me a lot. I guess I grew aware of how distant I was with my faith, and there were these people I guess God was sending a message telling me that there are
people so remember you and care for you, love you. It was just like 목사님۳ did a lot for me.

Isabella (F2) agreed her church pastor had empowered her:

Now that I have moved to connect the ministry the Korean church that I attend, I think largely the pastor, the English ministry pastor, he has helped me I guess to find God in every aspect of my life … It wasn’t even like the words of the pastor just his actions, like he has joy in every single thing that he does. So I think it was God’s way of teaching me to have grace for others that in my eyes there might be shortcomings but they are not too God’s.

Joseph (M2) found himself empowered by the church leaders such as elders and deacons:

I think the church had a very big role even till this day because church is where I found comfort, so especially witnessing a lot of 장로님들۴ the deacons and the elders and the pastors, so a lot of caring and a lot of warmth. So I definitely see, because I wouldn’t get the attention through my childhood but thankfully, for they all showed compassions to me.

Ethan (M4) believed that he had also been empowered by the church people who were older and went through a lot of things in life. To see how they coped with their struggles and to listen to their thoughts were positive influences.

I actually did have a lot of positive influences and I really thank God for that, because most of it was from the church ... It would have to always be someone older, someone I just look up to “wow, this person lived so much longer than I have” you know, “he or she has been through so much more than I have” ... just those kinds of notes, those kinds of people that I really kind shaped who I am today and how they dealt with things you know, having patience especially like from a Christians’ standpoint …Those people have to be like all from the church. It's those kinds of people that are really positive influences.

Jeremiah (M5) was able to overcome all his and his family’s issues associated with his father’s disease thanks to the support from the church he was attending. He considered the support he got a source of empowerment:

Once a junior year came along, my dad got diagnosed with a Parkinson’s Disease, so there was a lot of problems then, so because of that, because it was a junior year in high school, SATs were the biggest problems, it was all the stress and then with family stacking up, it was worse, then everything started to slowly stack up on top of each other and made it a lot harder for me to progress in junior year. But I feel like because of church support, because of God, I was able to stick it through junior year.

۳ Mok-Sa-Nim, which means a pastor.
۴ Jang-Ro-Nim-Deul, which means elders at church.
David (M3) also reported on his experience from a youth ministry that taught him how to be a good follower of Jesus Christ every day. He believed it as a source of empowerment for him to be a better Christian.

I joined the ministry called “Kids for Seek” and a lot of people are very good followers of Christ and that really influenced me to just do better, just to follow him better, just to have a heart that seeks him more and more. So that gives me, influences me just want to be like them in a way, so I could just become a really the follower as well.

Several youth believed that their parents empowered them and played a major role in their lives. Besides religiosity, parents were the second most prevalent empowering agent. They frequently expressed how grateful they were for their parents’ love and sacrifice for their better life. For example, Alice (F1) commented:

If I were to switch lives with my mom, I feel like I would be depressed. What’s life? What is the meaning of life? All she does is go to the nail salon and then come home, and then sleep, watch TV only to wake up to do that all over again. Ultimately, she is doing it for me. So I grow more of that awareness every day.

Isabella (F2) considered her mother as the one who had empowered her not to give up on anything and to develop the mentality of trying hard. She believed that she was going to apply for a Medical school with her mother’s support.

I don’t care what other people think, I am just gonna try everything, if I fail, at least I tried it. That’s definitely the mentality that I have with going to med school just because my mom, she regrets not going into what she wanted to do, so she is like, ‘just try it.’ My parents are supportive.

Joseph (M2) was raised by his mother—his father was not around while he was growing up. He expressed often how much his mother empowered him through the difficult times for him and his family. He believed that his mother was his role model to follow in many different aspects of his life:

But through that time, my mom is a very strong woman, she provided everything, the food and everything just by herself, it was remarkable. If someone asks me, “who is your father?” my father figure would definitely be my mom. My mom was my father and my mother. That’s why I don’t feel resentment toward my father, I would say because she
was so good, and she actually helped me find who I was through her hard work and
diligence to become a parent, to become an adult, to become a person in this world to
survive.

David (M3) recalled one of his early memories about the time he was doing so wrong but
his mother did not punish him, but, instead, she gave him what he did not deserve. He believed
that what his mother did for him made him realize how good she was to him. The way she raised
him was the biggest influence:

I think my mom really influenced me a lot because the way she raised me up ... She
wouldn’t get too mad at me instead she would take upon herself, so the way she raised
me really worked because one story I can remember is ... I actually got caught shoplifting
once and when I called my mom to pick me up, she wasn’t upset, she was like ‘oh I am
sorry, ‘should I have given you more money before you left the house?’ She took it upon
herself and then even after, she actually took me to shopping because she thought I
wanted it ... Yeah she gave me the least punishment, and just like looking back on my
mom, she is like very patient and loving and kind, it’s like she is a really good example of
how I would like to be especially as an adult, so I feel like she had one of the best,
greatest influences on me.

Jeremiah (M5) commented that as an only child, his parents gave him all their love and
support. They were his source of empowerment:

My parents would support me all the time, be able to be flexible with my choices, and
especially because my parents had another son before me, but died earlier when he was a
baby, my parents took very, very tight grasp of my life and tried to make the end goal the
best human being as possible.

Besides Christian faith and parental love, a few respondents reported a college professor
or mentor as a source of empowerment. For instance, Isabella (F2) believed that a professor
empowered her by pushing her to do what she never thought possible:

In college through the professor pushing me to kind of strive for more to get out of my
comfort zone, that’s when I started to become I guess to go against what my family and
my parents had raised me in terms of being like an Asian American.

Cindy (F3) identified a mentor from college who shared her background as someone who
helped her especially with identity struggles:

It was when I went to college and I met someone through good religious affiliation for
students. He was my mentor, he grew up under two Korean parents ... He was a pastor’s
kid, and speaking with him, he had a lot of things to I guess to tell me in terms of doing his own thing … Yeah he did his own thing, but he did it because he found his own way. It was kind of like that guidance, like finding someone as an example.

A final source of empowerment for the Korean youth was friends. Several mentioned friends were the people who influenced and strengthened them. For example, Cindy (F3) reported her Latina friend challenged her mindset about identity and gave her a new perspective on her struggles:

It’s actually my friend but she is a Latino, so it’s very weird how she has an effect on me, my choices ... She is also used to struggling to find her place in society, but her culture is more open and independent, and she doesn’t hesitate to do things her way and just report it to her family of what she is doing. So, speaking with her and hang out with her, and just seeing her being her own person, being her own body, that kind of influenced me a lot.

Joyce (F5) mentioned her best friend persuaded her to go church, which allowed her to become a Christian and totally changed her life.

In college, like one of my best friends, she got saved and I thought that how she changed when she started going to church, so I think that made me curious and I was, since this was after my whole hospitalization at one night, and I was kind of come then, but then I think I was very up for like “oh maybe this will help me,” and then I started going to church regularly.

David (M3) believed his best friend, church people, and family influenced him. He believed that he grew up to be a better person through their support and life lessons.

Growing up, I think my most positive influences are like my best friend Elias, and like people older than me who took care of me like taught me life lessons like of course my family. Of course the church members still have positive influences.

2. Communion themes in life stories. McAdams (2002) states that communion is identified when a protagonist reports on life episodes in which “different people come together in warm, close, caring, and communicative relationships concerning love, friendship, intimacy, sharing, belonging, affiliation, merger, union, nurturance, etc.” (p. 8). The communion themes were examined through four subcategories: life episodes that represent (1) Love/Friendship (LF), (2) Dialogue (DG), (3) Caring/Help (CH), and (4) Unity/Togetherness (UT).
a. Love/Friendship (LF). According to McAdams (2002), the theme of love/friendship (LF) manifests when “a person experiences an enhancement of erotic love or friendship toward another person” (p. 8). Love/friendship was the most common theme under the communion category across the life stories of Korean youth. Nine out of ten youth reported episodes of love/friendship. The episodes included when an interviewee met a Korean friend for the first time, developed a friendship with non-Korean friends, met an ex-boyfriend while visiting Korea, and met close friends from church. An Italian friend from middle school helped Isabella (F2) realize her Korean heritage:

I guess during middle school when I met one friend and I became really close to her. She was from an Italian family, but her family was very culturally aware, they were very strongly proud of their Italian heritage, so meeting them kind of helped me realize my Korean heritage.

She also commented on her experience meeting a Korean friend for the first time, when she first moved to New York. She described how she felt on her first day of school in New York which was a whole new environment to her, and how she was able to make friends with a Korean girl who is still close to her.

When I first moved to New York, I remember my first day, my first class, there was this girl that was sitting right behind me and I was kind of obviously nervous because I was like “what if I don’t get any friends?” But before class started, she tapped me from behind, and I turned around and then she asked me “Are you Korean?” and I was like “oh yeah, yeah” and we became friends after that ... I am still very close with that friend.

Cindy (F3) described how, despite her introverted personality, she became friends with a few Korean girls:

My Korean friend, she was a sister of one of my close friends that I had in high school, and you know, she had a very outgoing personality, very inviting personality, but for me, I am very like closed off when I meet new people, and I guess she kind of saw that and she kind of tried her way into my life, now I just joke like “you are an uninvited friend of my life, your sister never wanted.” Now we joke about it and she influences me a lot.

Lily (F4) shared her experience of meeting her ex-boyfriend when she was visiting Korea a few years ago:
I met my ex-boyfriend last year when I went to Korea. I said no in the beginning, but then after I came back to New York, he kept trying. So I was like “maybe he is not doing this to just like play around, maybe he is like actually means it,” so I was like “okay” and we dated. That’s also kind of the reason why I went to Korea this summer too because I knew he would be going every summer. Also I had been working while I was at school anyway, so I had money saved, so I was like, “why not go too”? So we met in Korea.

Joyce (F5) talked about how she met her best friend and how her friend influenced her life and her perspectives on things.

I think that friend I told you about, my best friend, she is really the one that changed my perspective and I do rely on. We met when I was in 8th grade when I moved to the new middle school, I knew her from 8th grade. I mean we went to different college, but she went through a lot of hard things in her life too, and I think she just changed so drastically, and that really changed my perspective on things, yeah. She influenced me a lot. Even until now, I always ask her for her opinion on things.

Jason (M1) recalled a guy whom he became friends with after some fights over small things during high school.

In junior high school, there was this one guy in my gym class and one day, we just got into an argument and fight over something that small ... but then for about a month or two, we really hated each other, just giving each other dirty looks, just provoking each other from across the school yard. One day, out of nowhere, we both decided to walk up to each other and say, “hey man, I think this is stupid, why don’t we just be friends, this doesn’t make any sense,” and then he became a really good friend of mine all the way through high school until he had to move back to his country for college.

Four men discussed that they had met their closest friends from church and considered them important in their lives. For example, Joseph (M2) talked about his intimate relationship with several Korean friends that he considered as brothers. He met his close friends from church when he was at the lowest point in his twenties. Here he explains:

I have friends that I could call brothers who support me in all the time with unfailing love and trust ... Second closest friend when I met, when I went back to church, when I found what it means for faith to be Christ-centered, what God wants. It’s like realizing I can count on somebody, when I am at my lowest, I could rely on somebody where I could you know, lean on somebody, 기대고 싶은 사람5 and that was actually when I found those of my close friends.

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5 He spoke in Korean. The phrase is spoken as Gi-Dae-Go-Sip-Eun-Sa-Ram and it is interpreted as “someone I want to rely on.”
David (M3) reported on how he became close to his old friend again after being disconnected for a while and how this made him happy. He called him a brother:

My best friend Elias and I, since we met at really young age at church, we’ve always been very close, but I think we met each other like once a week, we barely talked to, but then, recently we really kind of reconnected even closer ... And that just gave me a sense of just like home that no worries, just like I am comfortable like no matter what happens, yeah ... I have a sense of like second family and a brotherhood, like a sense of security.

Ethan (M4) recalled the day he went to church with his friend and how it gave him such great feelings of intimacy and being connected:

When I first went to same church with my best friend Daniel, we went to this church called Trinity church, that was when I got to first interact with people who I can relate with, people who, “wow like I understand this guy, he understand me.” I really was able to feel this strong connection at that point. I guess that’s why we are still close.

Jeremiah (M5) reported on his friendship with his pastor’s son, how they became close, how they felt about each other and supported each other in difficult times.

And the pastor’s son, I don’t know why but when he first came, we started talking and he would talk about his childhood and how rough he had it as a pastor’s kid, I guess. So because of that, we were very open with each other ... There was this certain point when we called each other brothers, because I was an only child, I always wanted the sibling, so we would always text each other or talk whenever one of us feeling down, we would always encourage each other, yeah we definitely pray for each other.

b. Dialogue (DG). McAdams (2002) states that the theme of dialogue (DG) is noted when “a person experiences a reciprocal and non-instrumental form of communication or dialogue with another person or group of others” (p. 9). Dialogue was not a common theme across the Korean youth’s life story. Only one woman and two men reported episodes pertaining to the theme. For example, Cindy (F3) reflected on her conversation with her Latina friend, who challenged her perspective on identity issues. Here she said,

My friend at work, she is a part of her culture, she doesn’t hide it, but she also grew up here ... she puts herself as her unique, individual being supersedes her cultural identity or her ethnic identity, and I respect her, because I am so struggling to be a part of this or that. Even she says that “why are you trying to be a part of this or that? You can be just you, what’s wrong with that?” Yeah, she is like again, “there are people who are Antarctica,
who are Australian” you know, “we are also part of this whole global unit” “you are just you” ... Yeah, she gave me a different perspective.

Ethan (M4) discussed a school friend who taught him how to be humble and grateful for even the small things he had:

I think it was in eighth grade, I found out he was an only child and had a single parent, mom, and ... I kind of questioned “oh why do you act like this? Why are you so hardened like so callous towards everyone?” And when he told me about everything he went through because he is a Puerto Rican and everything he had to go through with his mom ... he told me like, at the end of the day, he always thanks to his mom, “she got this for me, she is working her butt off for me, just for me so I could do better.” That really was a humbling experience.

Jeremiah (M5) shared one of his dialogues with his mother about the economic situation of Korea in the past and how this kind of conversation had an effect on the way he was raised. He believed that he became very grateful for the small things in life due to the stories he had listened to growing up:

I guess my mom’s story about her growing up when she was a kid after the Korean War, I remember the first time I had a banana, my mom said, “이거 진짜 잘 먹어야 돼.” And then I questioned “why? why is it so important?” and then she told me that after the Korean War, Korea was very poor, had nothing, and the bananas were very small and very rare and very expensive and whenever she had a banana, she would always cry because she was so grateful about. So, she would always say it’s the best thing ever even though it’s the smallest one. I think because of that story, that story made me value the small things in life, so that positively influenced me.

c. Caring/Help (CH). McAdams (2002) notes that caring/help (CH) is recognized when “a person reports providing care, assistance, nurturance, help, aid, support, or therapy for others” (p. 10). Several youth shared caring/help experiences such as taking care of their family and friends. For example, Isabella (F2) reported on helping her parents with bills when she started working after college:

I was helping my parents with the bills and just wanting to get the higher salary because I think that’s kind of in America what you are defined by, what your job is, and how much you make.

6 E-Go-Jin-Ija-Jal-Meok-Eo-Ya-Dae is translated as “you should eat this really well.”
Joseph (M2) remembered his experience of working 12 hours a day for a few years to provide for his family when his dad caused a big money problem and went back to Korea. He believed that it was an opportunity for him to grow as a person and he was able to learn many important things in life through the experience:

In my late teens, my father caused an incident where he owed a lot of money and I started working full-time. I started working seven days a week, 12 hours a day in downtown Manhattan. So four hours’ commute every day, twelve hours’ work every day. I would literally come home just to eat and sleep and just go back to work and I did this for about a year and half. I think that’s actually what I experienced I would never forget, because it taught me discipline, it taught me punctuality, it taught me hard work, it taught me sacrifice.

Joseph (M2) recalled speaking with his mother about their money problem:

So, I told my mom, “엄마 don’t worry about it, don’t worry about dad, don’t worry about the debt because I could handle it. I am at the age, I am old enough I could handle what the family is. What you can’t do, I will fill in.” That’s how my mom and I have been really living. When she can’t do, I would always support and do more because when I couldn’t work, she did all of it.

Jason (M1) also reported on his experience helping his parents financially when they lost their jobs several years ago:

There was a time when I was 22 or 23, when my parents lost their jobs, I had to work, so I was really busy and didn’t hang out with my friends as much.

The second form of caring/help was helping friends or other people around them. For example, Joseph (M2) reported an episode of caring/help where he expressed the joy of helping his friend with fixing cars:

I love cars and I still fix cars. I know how the cars work, and I know what to do. I fix cars and I love it. So I could become an auto mechanic. I actually go to my friend’s shop to help him fix cars right now. Because helping my friend and his father, it’s fun.

Jason (M1) reflected on helping an Asian guy who did not speak English when he was being insulted by a White woman at McDonalds’:

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7 Eom-Ma means mom.
I was 17 at the time. I used to be in McDonalds’ with my friends, it was this Asian kid, he was just kind of running around the store a little bit, he wasn’t hurting anybody, he was just walking back and forth from his parent’s table and the little playground that they have, and there was this Caucasian woman, she started yelling at the kid, and the kid’s dad didn’t speak English ... So, I was thinking, “oh I can’t believe this woman” and for some reason I was just really angry when she said that. And I was thinking, it was because he was Asian, he was being mistreated by a White. Assuming that, I went up to her like “what you were saying was wrong because this man doesn’t speak English, it doesn’t mean you can just step all over what you want.” ... and everybody was watching and telling me, “you did a good job, you showed her, people like that need to be corrected.”

Jason (M1) also talked about how he and his Korean boss helped each other. For example, he used to help him with English, whereas his boss taught him Korean history and culture.

I enjoyed working there so much, because my immediate boss I worked with he was so Koreanized, and he was teaching me about the issues in Korea and more about my culture, and I would teach him English, he would teach me Korean, I learned a lot back and forth.

d. Unity/Togetherness (UT). McAdams (2002) says, “The theme of Unity/Togetherness (UT) captures the communal idea of being part of a larger community” (p. 11). Five out of ten Korean youth reported on unity/togetherness themes. The episodes highlighted community experiences and developing multicultural friendship with different groups of people. The first group of episodes was related to community experiences. For example, Isabella (F2) discussed how she felt when she first experienced the sense of being a part of the Korean community when she moved to New York at the beginning of her high school years. She expressed her feeling of togetherness and being united with other Koreans:

After I moved to New York which was after my freshman year of high school, that’s when I actually really started to accept my Korean values and just the Korean part of myself … Just the fact that there were all kind of like their parents were immigrants but they were born here, so they all could be so much Korean and so we would speak like 콩글리시8 to each other, and so more and more so I became familiarized with Korean heritage. I was among peers that were like myself. So I felt like they accepted me more even if I was weird.

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8 *Kong-Geul-Li-Sh* is a combination of Korean and English, meaning Koreanized English.
Ethan (M4) felt joy when he went to a church and met a lot Korean friends there. He felt so close and could relate to the kids there because only they had his same background:

At that point, going to that church, and that was like really highlight moment in my life in my childhood. I felt like, “this is it, no worries, feels so fun, get free.” Probably when I was in 4th or 5th grade. Just that sense of understanding well, such as I can really relate to this guy or these guys, you know they were very similar to me, and they were similar in my situation, and they can put themselves in my shoes, so because of that I really felt good.

The other life episodes of the youth that represented unity/togetherness were related to the youth’s experiences of multicultural friendship. For example, Isabella (F2) reported that during her college years, she met her close African American friends and became a part of the Christian community with them.

While in college my roommate, she was an African American and one of my closest friends who I still talk to, he was also an African American and I got really lucky that when I went to college, I had a community of like Christian brothers and sisters, and we like supported each other, prayed for each other, and especially those two like they always checked up on me and they always asked me how I was doing not only just my life, but how I was doing spiritually, that really touched me.

Jason (M1) also discussed how he felt when he became associated with different groups of people at college:

In college, I finally started think race didn’t really matter, everybody would just make study groups, it didn’t matter your race, we all go to class together, we hang out together, and we just helped each other a lot, so I think that was really good in terms of racism.

Joseph (M2) reflected on conversations he had with his multicultural friends about how to fight against racism:

When my friends and I get together for barbecue, I remember one time my friend’s father came out, he goes, “what is this, United Nations”? And I thought that was a very smart comment because we never thought about that, we never thought about racism, we never thought about segregation, about persecution. We were just a couple of guys hanging out having a barbecue, having a good time. When he mentioned United Nations, it was like, this is a good start, this is a place we could break racism. You know there is a lot of stereotypes and a lot of words need to be really shattered.
3. The Integration of Agency and Communion in the Life Stories of the Korean Youth. The life stories of my interviewees revealed a greater tendency toward agency-oriented, American life styles. The most common theme of agency was self-mastery, that is, the Korean youth reported episodes of self-mastery most frequently. On average, they shared the episodes of self-mastery 3.9 times in their life story interviews (3.8 times for the women and 4.0 times for the men). The second common theme of agency was empowerment. The youth, on average, reported empowerment episodes 2.6 times in the interviews (2.4 times for the women and 2.8 times for the men). Agency themes of status/victory and achievement/responsibility were rare. Communion themes were less frequent in the life stories of the Korean youth. The most common theme of communion was love/friendship, which they reported on average, 1.1 times in their interviews (1.0 times for the women and 1.2 times for the men). The remaining three communion themes were less prevalent. Table 3 describes the number of reports for the women and men and the total sample by each theme for agency and communion.

Table 3.

The Number of Reports for the Women and Men and the Total Sample by Each Theme of Agency and Communion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>Self-Mastery (SM)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status/Victory (SV)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement/Responsibility (AR)</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empowerment (EM)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communion</td>
<td>Love/ Friendship (LF)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dialogue (DG)</td>
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<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Caring/Help (CH)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unity/Togetherness (UT)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The theme of agency and communion in the life stories of the Korean youth was related to their identity perceptions. In addition, several youth occasionally integrated two different themes of agency and communion in the description of their life stories. For example, Alice (F1) noted that she developed a sense of independence (agency) after her father passed away because she had much to take care of while helping her mother (communion). She also learned much about Korean culture, which made her realize her Korean identity.

My dad’s death impacted me a lot. Through this experience, I learned to be independent, more assertive because my mom is an immigrant, I had to take care of a lot of stuff. In that way, I learned a lot about myself like Korean cultural stuff. I feel like it was a time for me to learn to become independent because of that event.

Isabella (F2) mentioned that after she graduated from college, she became more focused on achieving her goals (agency) as she was financially helping her parents (communion). She realized what she should do to succeed in America, which indicated that she was embracing both her Korean and American identity. She described where she was going with her life:

Once I graduated or started working, I became a lot more focused on my own ambition side like achieving things because I was helping my parents with the bills and just wanting to get the higher salary because I think that’s kind of in America what you are defined by, what your job is, and how much you make, so how much can I achieve as fast as possible, it’s kind of where my last chapter is.

Cindy (F3) discussed that she realized she found more comfort in her non-Korean friends as she identified herself as an American (agency), but she still accepted the fact that she was Korean with all the Koreans’ supporting family values deeply wired inside her (communion). She thought that it was best for her to do both at the same time as she knew that she could not run away from her family even if she wanted to live her own life.

I’m still searching for where I really belong to, so I feel more comfort in my non-Korean friends but the older I get, the more I see, nothing important but the big value that Korean culture is going to play on my relationship with my family especially now they are getting older and I need to be the one who take care of them. So, it’s something that I know I can’t run away from, so if I can find a resolution, that would be great, but for now, I’m still trying to search as to what would be the best path for me.
Episodes that denoted agency and communion themes were also re-analyzed when they were related to other coding categories of the study. For example, under agency, a majority of the youth reported God or church leaders as a source of empowerment. These episodes were rearranged and analyzed in terms of the youth’s church experiences. When they reported parents as the empowering agent, the youth’s parents-related episodes were again analyzed in terms of family relations. If the youth reported that they came to appreciate their Korean or Asian identity (self-mastery) when they encountered American stereotypes of Asians, these episodes were also rearranged and analyzed under the category of prejudices and discrimination.

**B. Two Discourses of Identity: Discourse of Dispositions vs. Discourse of Agency**

Two discourses of identity were analyzed to show how the Korean youth used different verbs in their narratives to indicate different ways of identity positioning (Kang & Lo, 2005). According to Kang and Lo, the two types of discourses are associated with the use of specific verbs. I searched for specific verbal cues that denoted ways of describing identity.

1. **Discourse of dispositions.** For the discourse of dispositions, I looked for the use of verbs of volition such as want, esteem, like, feel, think, and prefer. These verbs indicated the youth’s thoughts and feelings about their Korean American identity. I analyzed how the youth expressed their thoughts and emotional states in describing their Korean or American identity. The most frequently used verbs of volition to be categorized as discourses of dispositions were feel, feel like, think, guess, understand, and realize.

   **The use of feel and feel like.** The Korean youth frequently described their perception of identity using the verbs feel or feel like. Here are the examples of the discourses of dispositions using the verbs feel and feel like from the Korean youth’s narratives.

   Alice (F1) stated,
I feel like deep down I still have my Korean values still, but not fully. I naturally feel burdened some times. Oh my God, what if I am not successful? I am gonna feel really crappy. I feel like that’s something a lot of my Korean friends and I relate on.

Isabella (F2) said,

I feel like a lot of pressures put on me from my parents because they don’t necessarily expect a lot out of my brother.

Cindy (F3) expressed,

I just didn’t really fit in any way I felt like. I look like you, we have similar background but I don’t feel connected with you anything. I was feeling like I am a floater… When I went to Korea for summer, and I didn’t really get a feeling, a good sense of welcoming.

I feel like it’s my duty to provide them with that. I feel like it’s something that is unique about Korean society.

I feel more comfort in my non-Korean friends.

Joyce (F5) said,

I feel like we were taught to behave in a certain way, I think, be like patient, obedient things like that.

Joseph (M2) stated,

Italians and Koreans, I feel like we have a very similar bond too. We have this pride problem.

David (M3) reported,

I kind of feel like Koreans have this national pride for their country, and I myself have that so.

Ethan (M4) mentioned,

I really was able to feel this strong connection at that point. I could feel just so much closer to this guy than all these other kids at school.

Jeremiah (M5) said,

I was fortunate to become pretty popular I guess, so I felt like I started to fit in.
The use of think and guess. The next group of verbs often used in the Korean youth’s interview narratives were think and guess. Here are the examples of the discourses of dispositions using the verbs of think and guess from the transcripts.

Isabella (F2) talked about realizing she was an Asian and how much she had been influenced by many Asian values.

Up until middle school, I didn’t really think about the fact that I was Asian.

I think that one main difference that I found between my friend and myself and my non-Asian friends like my Caucasian friends, I think Asian friends myself included, we have this sense of responsibility, that we need to take care of and pay back at our parents.

I think I am like greatly influenced by Asian culture, I don’t like touching at all.

Cindy (F3) expressed her feelings of not fitting in with Korean group by using the verbs of think and guess. For example, she said,

I think I don’t really have a lot of connections in terms of with people or friends with my own background.

I guess nobody wanted to relate to me and it was a little uncomfortable, and my mom didn’t really get why I was so uncomfortable. In terms of Korean society, they don’t see me as Korean because they consider me too Americanized.

I think I was a bit hurt, I grew up trying to fit it into one group another and already that impression that I got was “you are not a part of us.” I think that was a moment where I kind of drew the line between all kids.

Jason (M1) discussed,

I finally started to think race didn’t really matter. I don’t think being Asian has any influence like held me back from anything … I guess I was pretty comfortable, I would have passion for English language because I was Asian.

Ethan (M4) mentioned,

I was thinking I am not an American, I am a Korean and that’s when it really started to hit me in high school.

Jeremiah (M5) said,

I guess I grew up as a whitewashed Korean American, yeah because I wasn’t really with Asians.
The use of *know, understand, realize, and consider*. The Korean youth also included these verbs to express their dispositions: *know, understand, realize, and consider*. Here are the examples of the discourses of dispositions using the verb of *know, understand, realize*, and *consider* from the transcripts of the Korean youth.

Isabella (F2) talked,

I *only really started to understand* the fact that I was Asian, what that played a part of in my life I guess during middle school.

I really *got to understand* what being an American means and what being a Korean I guess means more so like while I was studying abroad, I *came to understand*.

When I met one friend and I became really close to her … They were very strongly proud of their Italian heritage, so they kind of helped *me realize* my Korean heritage.

Lily (F4) reported,

I *don’t really consider* myself to be any different from other like Korean Americans. I *consider* myself, even though I was born in America, I *consider* myself a big part of like Korean culture.

Jason (M1) said,

At least I *know* what I am talking about, I am an Asian and I am Korean, so I *know* my parents are from Korea and I *understand*.

David (M3) reported,

That’s when I kind of *realized* that though I am an American-born citizen, I still *consider* myself Korean as well.

When I think *I realized* also “oh, this is what it means to be Korean, this is what it means to be American.” That’s when I was in turning point.

Ethan (M4) mentioned,

I started thinking “no, I am not an American,” so probably I *realized*, like *the realization* at that point in high school.
The use of other verbs of volition. Other verbs of volition that were used in the Korean youth’s narratives were *want*, *wish*, *like*, *embrace*, and *become familiarized*. Here are examples of discourses of dispositions.

Alice (F1) said,

I *don’t like* Korean music anymore. I used to *like* K-pop but not anymore.

Isabella (F2) said,

More and more so *I became familiarized* with Korean heritage, I guess.

Cindy (F3) said,

I *wanted to* fit in and if I had Korean friends, they all went to church, so for me to kind of be friends with them, I would be like, oh I’ll give it a try … It’s still a struggle I guess, and at some point I kind of *wish I wasn’t* Korean.

Jason (M1) mentioned,

I *didn’t want to* become Asians who live in America but don't know the culture, who refuse to learn English or refuse to mingle with other groups of people, I *don’t wanna* be that type of person, like my parents’ generation.

I *like* having multicultural circle of friends. I *didn’t like* the Korean groups much because they were the worst with racism.

David (M3) reported,

I *don’t wanna like* all my Korean heritage, so I kind of *like the idea of being* a Korean-American, so I can *embrace* both sides.

Ethan (M4) mentioned,

I *guess I kind of embraced* the fact that you know, I am Korean … Whether I was born in Korea or here or somewhere else, no matter where I go, I will still be Korean.

2. Discourse of agency (observable actions). For the discourse of agency (observable actions), I looked for the use of verbs that described ethnic behaviors such as *watch, listen, wear,* and *talk*. These verbs implied the youth’s practice of Korean identity. The discourse of agency that involved these verbs appeared in descriptions of ethnic behaviors and practices. Here are examples of the discourses of agency in the Korean youth interview transcripts.
Alice (F1) stated,

So that's when I first learned about how to *speak* to a Korean elderly people.

Isabella (F2) mentioned,

Just the fact that their parents were immigrants but they were born here, so they all could be so much Korean and so we *would speak* like 콩글리시⁹ to each other.

Cindy (F3) said,

Even if I *spoke* full Korean, my mentality wasn’t Korean for them … I *used to watch* Korean TV shows growing up…. I’m not going to *watch* Korean news every single time, I wanna *watch* Modern Family, I wanna *watch* Big Bang Theory.

Lily (F4) mentioned,

I *speak* Korean at home. I *talk to* my mom in Korean … The TV shows I would *watch* on the internet were always Korean programs.

Joseph (M2) said,

I *watched* a lot of Korean soap operas growing up. I *always watched* it with my mom … I can *speak* Korean fluently in conversation with my mom.

Jeremiah (M5) said,

I *tried to immerse* myself in Korean culture a little bit, I *listened to* Korean music, K-pop, be able to *learn* a little, like *overstepped* the boundary a little bit and like *explore* like *learn more about* Korean culture and the history.

3. Combination of two discourses in the Korean youth’s narratives. In identity discourses, the Korean youth sometimes combined two types of discourses—discourse of disposition and discourse of agency—in the same sentences or in adjacent sentences. Thus, the Korean youth’s identity discourses were occasionally inseparable. Here are the examples of such sentences.

Lily (F4) mentioned,

Not only the *way I talk and act* (discourse of agency) but also the *way I look* (discourse of agency), I kind of like *more accustomed to* (discourse of disposition) like Korean life

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⁹ *Konglish*, slang that Koreans use to imply Korean style English use.
style. If I don't talk (discourse of agency), then they don't know that I was born in America.

Jason (M1) said,

I didn't really speak (discourse of agency) Korean at all at that time. At least I know (discourse of disposition) what I am talking about (discourse of agency), I am an Asian and I am Korean, so I know (discourse of disposition) my parents are from Korea and I understand (discourse of disposition).

David (M3) reported,

That’s when I thought (discourse of disposition), ‘oh I really need to brush up on (discourse of agency) my Korean heritage’ just like, I need to actually embrace the fact (discourse of disposition) that I am Korean not just American.

Here is another example from David (M3),

My Korean was really bad, I could barely speak (discourse of agency) and then I made up (discourse of agency) a lot of Korean words but only my mom would understand them. I was able to kind of realize (discourse of disposition) my Korean heritage myself and get better speaking (discourse of agency) Korean because I couldn't speak (discourse of agency) Korean at all. I am Korean American, I am gonna definitely get better (discourse of agency) in Korean so I can speak (discourse of agency) both Korean and English. So I think (discourse of disposition) that was my turning point.

C. Neighborhood and Cultural Adaptation

The code of neighborhood and cultural adaptation indicated whether the neighborhood they grew up in influenced the way they perceived and reported their cultural adaptation, for example, being Americanized or Koreanized. What was important was how the neighborhood was related to the youth’s intercultural or intracultural contact. An analysis of their narratives shows that the majority of the Korean youth reported that their neighborhoods greatly influenced them. They frequently expressed thoughts on acculturation or described experiences struggling to adapt to New York and American culture.

1. Neighborhood while growing up. The majority of the Korean youth reported that the neighborhood that they grew up in was important to their identity formation, but which neighborhood an interviewee grew up in mattered. That is, youth who grew up in a
predominantly White neighborhood were different from the youth who grew up in Flushing, Queens, which is a multicultural, predominantly Asian neighborhood with a large Korean population. Most of the youth grew up in Queens around the Korean community. One woman and one man, however, reported that they spent their early years in the Korean community in Queens but later moved to a White, Jewish neighborhood and grew up there. Both youth felt that they were Americanized; “Whitewashed” was the term they both used to describe themselves. For example, Alice (F1) thought that she was so Americanized because she and her family moved to a predominantly White neighborhood when she was in junior high school. She realized that her exposure to the mainstream American culture through her school years played a major role in her identity formation:

Where I grew up influenced me a lot. I grew up in Forest Hills, it’s a very Jewish dominant neighborhood, I had a lot of White friends, Jewish friends, and they are Russian Jews. Neighborhood is a huge impact. So I feel like that influenced me as who I am. I attended the Forest Hills High school which was also a lot of Jewish, Russian kids and whatever, and I liked it, it played a major role in my life, if I was stuck in Elmhurst, I wouldn’t even like be half the person I am today.

Jeremiah (M5) grew up in a White neighborhood in Great Neck, New York. He considered himself a whitewashed Korean American. Here is what he said:

I was first born in Forest Hills, then my parents gradually moved up to Great Neck. In north Great Neck, they were mostly Jewish like Persian Jews, Israeli Jews, there were a lot of Jewish, it was mainly 80% Jewish. So, I guess I grew up as a whitewashed Korean American, because I wasn’t really with Asians, there were a few Asians or a few Koreans, very few Koreans in high school, but most of my friends in high school were not Asians.

Unlike these two youth, the majority of respondents grew up in the Korean community in New York or New Jersey. Jason (M1) reported on growing up in Flushing, Queens which is the most ethnically diverse neighborhood in the United States where the minority is the majority.

Growing up I lived in Flushing, Queens. Flushing is multicultural, so the majority of people are minorities. It’s like minorities are the majority unlike different predominantly White neighborhood.
Queens, New York, however, is a large county with a huge diversity of races and ethnicities. Thus, the different neighborhoods in Queens explained the different types of intercultural or intracultural contact. For example, David (M3) experienced lots of intercultural contact in his Hispanic and Indian neighborhood. He noted a lack of Korean people and Korean culture:

I grew up in Elmhurst, Queens which is very, I would say, kind of Hispanic/Indian culture, so I didn’t have a lot of Korean influences around me other than my family because I didn't have a lot of Korean friends before high school.

Lily (F4), in contrast, felt she had been a part of the Korean community most of her lifetime:

I was born in Manhattan, and then I was always around New York, New Jersey area, and yeah, I never went outside of the east coast area ... I went to Korean school when I was younger and I speak Korean at home ... Even though I was born in America, I consider myself a big part of like Korean culture, so I did go to Korean school and I live around the Flushing area, so you know there is always a lot of Korean people there.

Moving to New York’s Korean community influenced social interaction and life. Isabella (F2) reported on her experience of moving in to New York from New Jersey:

I actually was born in New Jersey and the part of New Jersey that I eventually moved to around 4th grades, it was much more a Caucasian community and I think I was one out of three Korean American girls that was at my school in 4th grade ... So up until middle school, I didn’t really think about the fact that I was Asian. After I moved to New York which was after my freshman year of high school, that’s when I actually really started to accept my Korean values and just the Korean part of myself.

The three youth who were not born in the United States grew up in Korean communities either in New York or New Jersey, and they reported much intracultural contact, i.e., interaction with many Koreans. For example, Joyce (F5) recalled frequently moving from Korea to the United States and changing neighborhoods many times, even in New Jersey:

I was born in Korea and then when I was two, I moved to L.A., I think a year or a little over a year, and then I moved back to Korea, and then I moved back to the east coast, New Jersey when I was six going on seven, so then I lived in New Jersey until I went to college. Yeah while growing up, I was moving around a lot, even in New Jersey I moved
around a lot. When I was young, I lived in New Jersey, it was predominantly Korean and Indian, our townhouse area.

2. Thoughts on acculturation or struggles to adapt. Interviewees reported on thoughts about assimilation to the U.S. culture, the struggles they went through growing up. The majority of the youth reported as being Americanized. Adapting to U.S. culture proved relatively easy.

Alice (F1) considered herself Americanized though she acknowledged her Korean background:

I mean culturally, I’m Americanized, but if someone were to ask me where are you from or what’s your background, of course, I would say I am Korean, you know, but I don’t know, I mean I am still prideful of my country but it’s just like, I don’t even know what’s going on in there anymore, yeah.

Isabella (F2) mentioned that she realized how Americanized she had been when she was visiting South Korea for six months during college:

I studied abroad in South Korea in my junior year of college, that’s when I really got to understand what being an American means and what being a Korean means more so while I was studying abroad, I came to understand, wow, all of these things that confuse me and shock me or that I can’t understand in Korea, it makes me realize how Americanized actually I am.

Several youth commented that they struggled growing up. They had difficulty developing language skills, experienced financial problems in their family or conflicts with family members, had school related issues, and worked hard to fit in at school. Jason (M1) stressed the importance of learning English. He believed that Asians should learn and speak English well if they were to live successfully in the U.S. It was why he worked so hard to develop good English skills:

I would have passion for English language because I was Asian, I didn’t want to become Asians who live in America but don’t know the culture, who refuse to learn English or refuse to mingle with other groups of people, I don’t wanna be that type of person, like my parents’ generation because America is so big and there are so many opportunities here. That’s why I went above beyond learning English, and expressing a lot, reading a lot, and writing a lot.

Most of the youth reported having financial problems in their family while growing up.

Joseph (M2) reported on the many financial struggles he and his family went through. His family’s frequent moves during his school years were the result of financial problems:
You know, coming to a country with no family, with nothing, I think that’s really something that it’s a hard choice which you can’t see in front of you anything. At that time, my father and mother didn’t speak English of course, what they had as skills was not competitive or working for us ... Growing up, it was hard because we kept moving around in Queens not all over the States because I have been in New York all my life ... The transition between each school as a kid, like you just met a friend, but you are moving kind of thing.

Cindy (F3) reported trouble with identity issues and conflicts with her mother and grandparents over cultural adaptation. Here she expresses her thoughts on acculturation in an immigrant family:

If you are here permanently, you need to adapt, not the other way around because as far as that kid is concerned, they are American, they grew up with American values, they are not going to share what you learned in your 1980s when you were in school during the ‘80s and ‘90s, right? Like you have to, good to be knowledgeable about world events. I am more concerned about the American political debate than I have in Korean, what’s going on in Korea. I’m trying to get ahead in the American life.

Joyce (F5) discussed her thoughts on biculturalism as a child. She believed that biculturalism could be an advantage in terms of developing cultural flexibility; she felt, however, that children from immigrant families have to struggle in the process of becoming bicultural or bilingual, which could be a disadvantage in the U.S. society where everything has to happen quickly because they need more time than their peers.

Bilingualism, biculturalism, I guess there are goods and bads, but I guess bicultural could be an advantage because you are able to be more fluid ... Biculturalism could be an advantage, but I think being an immigrant, you have certain struggles, yeah you always trying to adapt to the environment and be an observer and be adapting to their systems and their social situations. I had to do that when I was young age, and since I moved around a lot, that’s a good skill like being able to adapt quickly which is a good thing, but also in society in work places, it can be a disadvantage.

D. Family Relations and Experiences

Family is an important component of Korean culture along with the emphasis on education. The coding of family relations and related experiences categorized how interviewees perceived their family relations in practicing Korean identity. The family code was divided into three subcategories: (1) thoughts on Korean parenting or parent-child relations, (2) value
conflicts between American youth and Korean parents, and (3) the youth’s perception of family support as an implicit obligation.

1. Thoughts on Korean parenting. The majority of the Korean youth reported their parents sacrificed so that they could live better in the United States. Their parents had had blue collar jobs and worked hard to pay for their schooling. The majority of the youth expressed their feelings of gratitude for their parents. For example, Alice (F1) mentioned,

One thing I really do like about Korean culture is like the parenting, I mean the love and sacrifice, at least with the immigrant parents moved to America. I don’t know if it's as much sacrifice in Korea, but I feel like there is a lot more sacrifice that happens when you immigrate to America. This is because one of the major reason for them to immigrate is for the children’s education.

Isabella (F2) reflected on what her parents had to do to give their children a better life, and she understood it as the meaning of family in Korean culture.

In addition to that sacrifice part, I think too part of that, is just very prominent and like immigrant parents, like culture, the fact that like my parents were immigrants and they came here, and they had to do I guess like blue-color jobs in sacrifice with what they wanted to do for myself and my brother to have like a better life, so that’s family I guess really.

Joyce (F5) remembered her single-mom’s hard work to send her to a good school:

My mom raised me and I’ve seen her work really hard trying to get me to go to good school like paying for my 학원[hag-won, see footnote 2] and you know supporting me through everything.

Jason (M1) was also mostly raised by his single mother. He described what it meant to be a mother in Korean culture:

I guess my mom, she is a mother and she works hard, she came to America just providing for the family. I think most of the time mothers are the backbone of the family even though there is a father. The mothers are the stronger ones, mentally and emotionally.

David (M3) believed that the way his mother had raised him influenced him greatly, and she was the one who he wanted to look to as a role model:

I think my mom, the way she raised me up really worked ... and just like looking back on my mom, she is like very patient and loving and kind, it’s like she is a really good
example of how I would like to be especially as an adult also, so I feel like she had one of the best, greatest influences on me.

Lily (F4) considered some Korean parents very conservative, but fortunately her parents, were different, which made her feel good:

When I look at other Korean parents, some parents are so conservative like one of my friend’s parents are, she is the youngest in her family and her parents are like, in high school, her curfew used to be 5 pm, so basically you have to go home right after you finish high school and then, even now when I would hang out with her, her parents keep calling her “where are you? Come home.” So I think my life would be horrible if I had to live like that.

Lily (F4) also commented that Korean parents were reticent about expressing love, even though they love their kids greatly. She understood such reticence is common in Korean culture:

I don’t think it’s a big thing to express love and care and stuff like that, so I just grew up, even though I knew about my parents love me, we never grew up saying like “I love you” and stuff like that.

Jason (M1) shared a unique idea on Korean parenting. In Korean culture when children are well-behaved and successful, we say that is because their parents raised them well. We say in Korean, 자식은 부모의 거울이다 to mean that children are the mirror of their parents. In other words, everything children do is a reflection of how their parents raised them. Jason noted:

I think all the stories I look up to are stories about our parents’ generation because they do so much for us. I hope that my friends and myself included are going to be able to do the same thing for our families when we get older and get married and have kids ... If you live hard and work hard, everyone is gonna look at youur parents raised well.” We wanna always be respectful and smart and the things that you do, the things that you say, it’s kind of reflection of how your parents raised you.

Jason (M1) thought Korean or Asian parenting strict. When he suffered a serious accident at a young age, he was so scared about being punished that he ignored the fear and pain:

I remember having the eye-patch coming out of the hospital. I was so young, all I was thinking about at that time, “oh man, I am in trouble.” I was so scared because I was gonna get in trouble with my parents, the pain wasn’t as bad. I wasn’t thinking about the blood, I wasn’t thinking about the pain, I was just thinking about I was gonna get in

10 Ja-Sik-Eun-Bu-Mo-Eui-Geo-Ul-E-Da is a common expression in Korea. It means that children are the mirror of their parents.
trouble because Asian, I think Asian families, they are so severe in being disappointed with their kids. I was definitely being scared about my parents at the time.

Cindy (F3) and Joseph (M2) shared stories about the emotional characteristics of Korean parents. Cindy (F3) believed that Korean parents were temperamental:

You know like Korean parents, Korean family are like, it’s tough love kind of thing, but for me it’s like they are kind of tempered. Yeah, that’s my picture.

Joseph (M2) talked about Korean fathers’ anger control issues, which was pretty common in Korean immigrant families as they lived by traditional patriarchal values.

There was a lot of frustration from my father, you know the struggles and all of the stress. He definitely lashed out onto my mom and myself. But I think that’s very common in the Korean American immigration because for Korean male being the alpha male, they just don’t know how to handle the stress and I believe that kind of reflected onto the child as they grow up especially in the immigration generation.

2. **Korean parents vs. American youth.** The majority of respondents reported that they had experienced value conflicts with their parents. Most youth were born in the United States and were exposed to the U.S. value system. Their parents, in contrast, were born and raised in South Korea and thus had a Korean mindset. The conflicts occurred about school and career choices, thoughts on dating and marriage partners, and traditional Korean patriarchal values.

Alice (F1) noted, for example, her mother objected to her going out for fun on weekend nights:

My mom doesn’t understand why I go out on the weekends, she hates that so much. She doesn’t understand that. After a weeklong of the same thing, same routine, work in school, you just wanna have fun on the weekends, she doesn’t understand that. That’s the disagreement we have. That’s her being close-minded too. My White friends’ mothers understand it. They get it. It’s the Korean parents don’t get it.

Alice (F1) argued with her mother about choosing a marriage partner. Her mom wanted her to marry a Korean guy because, unable to speak English, she feared not being able to communicate with her son-in-law. But that was not what the mother feared at all. She was fine, according to Alice, with marrying a Chinese. Alice shared her story:

It’s funny my mom actually said to me like you have to marry a Korean guy because of the communication barrier between her and my future husband. She was like, “I know if
you like date anyone who is not Asian like that’s the end of my relationship with you” she said that. She is not super Korean in the sense, “you have to marry a Korean.” She was like “Chinese guys are fine, they are rich.” and I was like “no.” you know, she just know that I’m not really attracted to that.

On the day of his interview, David (M3) shared his argument with his mother about a gay marriage issue. He believed that the reason why his mother and father were so close-minded about social issues such as gay marriage these days was because they were first generations who lived by traditional Korean values.

I actually got into a bit of argument before because my sister and her boyfriend are actually engaged, and my mom asked me, “oh David, you don’t have a boyfriend?” I was like “what?” She was like, “I mean girlfriend.” I was like, “oh, no I don’t” and then, “you are gonna pursue a girl though.” I was like, “yeah, of course, what are you trying to imply?” She was like “no, I am just checking if you like girls.” And I was like “are you trying to see if I am gay?” Then she was like, “yeah, but I am glad you are not.” I was like, “what if I was?” She was like, “I would reject you.” I was like, “are you serious?” I know I got pretty offended because the fact that my own mom would reject me ... I feel like we shouldn’t show them any anger but we should still love them because we are all still bothers and sisters, and that’s what God told us to do ... I got into such an argument with my mom and dad because I was like, “what kind of Christians are you?” But it’s more so just because they are first generation, yeah.

Cindy (F3) talked about her conflict with her mother about choosing a proper summer outfit. She had a trouble understanding her mother’s way of thinking about why Koreans are so concerned about how other people see them.

My mom, her way of thinking is kind of weird because in summer, it’s hot and you kind of wanna wear a tank-top outside, but she would be like, “oh, other people can do that, but we shouldn’t do that” ... But I’m like, “I’m hot, why should it matter?” And I tell her “there are other girls who have more volume than I do, they are not gonna be looking at me.” She is like, “yeah, but the way our cultural things, they are gonna devalue more as a person than they would do anyone else.” So she wants me to be more understanding of how Koreans are gonna see me.

Joseph (M2) and Lily (F4) shared their experiences of conflict with their parents on the issue of school choice. For instance, Joseph (M2) wanted to go to an engineering school that was far away from home, but he could not go because his parents objected. He understood and followed what his parents told him to, but he could not do what he wanted.
When I was a junior in high school, I got actually accepted into Thomas Edison School for engineering and I love that field with vision. But it was my parents that persuaded me “you are going to Bayside High School instead of that.” Because Thomas Edison is a bit far away from where I live in and you know at a young age, of course parents are over-protective and of course being an only child, I definitely understand their concern.

Lily (F4) also had a conflict with her parents on school choice. In junior high, her parents forced her to take a test for entering specialized high schools in New York, but she did not want to. As she could not avoid taking the test and she just messed it up.

My parents wanted me to go to specialized high school, and it was kind of the Korean parents’ pride for like their kid to go to you know, Stuyvesant or Bronx Science or something like that. I do remember like I was so stressed out like I didn’t, it was my choice not wanting to go there, but then my parents kept telling me to go there, so I remember taking the test ... I didn’t even look at the question, I just like bubbled in anything because I was like “oh I really don’t wanna go.”

Lily (F4) had a conflict with her mother about why her mother did not divorce her father when he was treating her badly. Yet, she realized later that her mother, like most Koreans, did not want Lily and her brother to grow up without a father figure:

At that time, I didn’t understand, if my dad was treating my mom so poorly, why don’t you just divorce? One time I was so sure that she wasn’t happy with my dad, so I was like, “why don’t you divorce him?” I was more of an American mindset, so I was like, “if you are not happy with the person, just divorce that person, and get that person out of your life.” ... because I didn’t understand why you live with somebody who makes you unhappy, but then she was saying, if she didn’t have me and my brother, then she would probably have divorced him, but she didn’t want us to grow up without a dad so. Even though it’s harder for her, she would rather go through it because she didn’t want us to grow up going from mom to dad. In America it is pretty common like one week at mom’s house and one week at dad’s house, but in Korea even though people do get divorce, I don’t think it’s as common. If it were me then I would have divorced my husband, then I don’t know I guess it’s a Korean thing, yeah.

Isabella (F2) did not share her dad’s Korean patriarchal values when it came to how to respect elders. While her dad insisted on being respectful to all elderly people no matter the situation, she stuck to her American way of showing respect for people.

I guess my uncle didn’t feel that I was very cheerful enough, so my dad yelled at me so much. I just started thinking it was dumb, you are comparing me to them, which is not fair ... I was like I understand he is your older brother, but I personally don’t feel like I disrespected him by saying “hello” in the way that I am comfortable with ... I have learned about my dad’s personality where he is very big on respecting elders ... But I do
try to be more open-minded than my dad ... I will give them the respect but if they are going to go power-hungry crazy, if they are not giving me the respect, why should I return that to them.

Isabella (F2) commented more about her dad’s dominant personality, which she linked to the traditional Korean patriarchal values such as male superiority or a strict father figure. She believed that these things had an effect on her even though she grew up in America.

My dad just because he is from the traditional Korean culture, he has that mentality of like, “I am the parents, I am right,” and he has this stereotypical like “Korean angry temper” so in that sense, that’s changed my outlook in terms of whenever I see someone fighting or yelling, I freeze out, and I don’t know how to like respond.

3. Support for parents and family as a burden. Korean families typically provide for parents when they get older. Four women (F1, F2, F3, and F5) and two men (M1 and M2) expressed an implicit obligation, an unavoidable burden. Interestingly, the youth who did not report family support as a burden were from 18 to 21-years-old, among the youngest of all participants. The majority of the youth, who reported being pressured, believed that their feelings of obligation influenced the way they chose their school and career path. For example, Alice (F1) commented that whereas the Korean parents sacrifice their entire lives for their children, children feel an equal obligation to provide for their parents when they are older.

While Korean parents sacrifice everything, that’s an amazing thing for us children, but we children have a burden like owing them something. Not that I don’t wanna do that for my parents, obviously that’s something I am going to do. Then I feel like it’s become an obligation, I don’t know I feel like it’s something fundamental to do when you are of Korean culture ... I feel like that becomes an issue, that’s when kids start feeling pressure. What if they are not financially successful? I naturally feel burdened some times. “Oh my God, what if I am not successful?” I am gonna feel really crappy. Sacrifice is beautiful on its own, but it’s also very paralyzing, I guess.

Isabella (F2) experienced an internal struggle between achieving her own goal and providing for her family, neither of which she could abandon. She noted that in Asian families the lives of parents and children are closely connected in every way and the idea of taking care of old parents is an implicit obligation to Asian children. In White families, however, the life of
parents and the life of children are separated, and the White children think what their parents did was their choice.

So I am trying to move towards a career where I can do that, help people who need help, but I can’t shake off the parents’ expecting me to take care of them when I get older or when they get older I guess. So I can’t exactly move to Africa and like, “good luck and bye.” So I am struggling, internal struggle, let’s call it that. I wanna do both. I think that one main difference that I found between my friend and myself and my non-Asian friends like my Caucasian friends, I think Asian friends myself included, we have this sense of responsibility, that we need to take care of and pay back our parents for taking care of us. While my Caucasian friends: “no, they made a decision to have you, so they have to deal with all the consequences that relate to you.”

Isabella (F2) also talked about when she was deciding what to study at college. She wanted to study music but she had to switch to business because she knew her parents would not approve. More important, she wanted to study for a career to provide for her family after college.

I actually did wanna pursue music but I have an older brother and he also got into music in college. He is very talented in singing, but my parents said no. They have the mentality of “you are not gonna make money if you become a musician.” So when I was deciding college, I also just decided to go with what is safe, which was business because everything is business. So that was also another chapter in my life where I struggled with just deciding what to pursue in college, a lot of that my decision incorporated what will make me successful so that I can take care of my parents.

Isabella (F2) repeatedly noted that supporting for her family affected everything she did. She perceived it as a constant struggle, especially when deciding on her future:

I think I am constantly striving towards some type of assurance whether it’s like future, having the assurance of even family connections and knowing that my family role, support them and me being there ... And I think I do always look for the approval of others when it comes to major things, yeah more assurance and acceptance I would say, the assurance that I would be able to support my family.

Cindy (F3) discussed her support for her mother and grandparents. She believed that her Korean heritage obliged her. And her obligation—really an unavoidable assignment—was even greater because her immigrant parents lacked a solid foundation in the United States. She even talked about her short- and long-term goals to provide for them:

I feel like it’s my duty to provide them with that if I can move on with doing my own stuff, maybe it’s a soft inflicted burden, I think it’s a lot of struggle that people from my
background go through, especially when they are fully aware of the cultural values and needs, and it’s like even if it’s not verbally expressed, you kind of know what’s expected, and you know like parents, they see you working hard, and they don’t wanna put their pressure on you, but it’s like the mutual agreement. It’s like, “I won’t say it, but you know this is what’s gonna happen.”

She added:

My immediate goal is to get a place for my family because we are still renting, and I want a place that we can call our own instead of having to rent and all that. For me like the only one that they can really get that is toward as me because still they can’t get along. They don’t have solid roots here to justify or verify whereas I can. And that’s maybe we can get a co-op apartment, and they can start off from there, and then I will work to pay off that, I guess more years to pay, and that will be theirs, and then after, that’s when I can find a place of my own to stay.

Cindy (F3) went on to comment that even if she had wanted to deny her Korean heritage and had found more comfort in affiliating with her non-Korean friends, she could not but admit that she was following those Korean values. And as she grew older she expected to find those Korean values even more compelling. She believed that either her personality or the Korean values deeply rooted inside her or both would guide her regardless of any Korean identity denial.

I feel more comfort in my non-Korean friends but the older I get the more I see nothing important but the big value that Korean culture is going to play on my relationship with my family, now they are getting older and I need to be the one who take care of them. So, it’s something that I know I can’t run away from, so if I can find a resolution, that would be great, but for now I’m still trying to search as to what would be the best path for me ... I don’t know if that’s just my personality holding me back or if it’s just the Korean values that’s so deeply wired into me that’s something I can’t control, maybe both.

Joyce (F5) reported feeling responsible for her single mother who had raised her through hard work. She felt lots of pressure to support her mother as she grew older. She seemed to express even anxiety of not being able to support her mother:

I do feel a lot of responsibility for my mom because she is the one that really raised me and I’ve seen her work really hard ... I feel like for her to grow old and not have the things that she needs to live, if I can’t give that for her, I feel like that would make me feel like I did fail in some kind way ... I have a lot of school debt, so not being able to like support my parents and help them as they get older I guess, like it’s okay for I’m struggling if it’s just on me, but if I can’t support my parents especially my mom.
Providing for his parents when they retired worried Jason (M1) and his sister, a common concern in Korean culture:

I hope my sister and I can be successful enough to help my parents retire because they already worked so many years over here.

E. Friends, School, and Korean Church Network

Coding for friends, school, and Korean church networks was performed to explore youth identity development. Four sub-categories were analyzed: (1) bicultural experiences and expectations with other Korean Americans; (2) Asian, Hispanic, Black, and White friendships; (3) important school experiences; and (4) Korean church experiences.

1. Sharing bicultural experiences and expectations with other Korean Americans.

All the Korean youth connected with this theme in their interviews. They reported that they had a close relationship with other Korean Americans from either school or church. They perceived that sharing similar experiences as a child from an immigrant family with other Korean friends was something meaningful to their life stories. Alice (F1) commented that she grew more aware on her parents’ sacrifice when she was older and that this is what she can share with her Korean friends as they have similar experiences and awareness. She believed that her White friends would never understand as they have no such experiences.

I feel like as I get older, I realize how much my parents sacrifice … I feel like that’s something a lot of my Korean friends and I relate on, so I think that’s really important because I feel like I might be victimizing the White kids, but I feel like the White kids don’t know that. Obviously, they love their parents as well, but they don’t have that first-hand experience like what sacrifice is, that’s why I really more appreciative.

Isabella (F2) remembered the day she first moved to New York and how she made her first Korean friend in high school. Through that experience, she began to make other Korean friends by reaching out to them first without hesitation.

I guess, when I first moved to New York, I was sixteen and I remember my first day. my first class, there was this girl that was sitting right behind me … Before class started, she
tapped me from behind, and I turned around and then she asked me “Are you Korean?” and I was like, “oh yeah, yeah,” and we became friends after that … I am still very close with that friend … If there is someone that I see, I just go up to them and ask them “Are you Korean?” so it gave me that sense of encouraging to step out of my comfort zone and be the first person to reach out to someone else.

Cindy (F3) told me about her Korean mentor from college who helped her understand her confusion as a Korean American. By speaking with him and just seeing what he was doing, she could find some way out with her identity issues.

It was when I went to college and … He was my mentor in terms of he grew up under two Korean parents, and they are both pastors … He did what he wants and he is still doing what he wants … I guess he has some knowledge, but he doesn’t speak or has any fluency in Korean language, he still feels Korean in the way that you know his parents are there, and he has no problem to interact with other people … Yeah he did his own thing, but he did it because he found his own way. It was kind of like that guidance, like finding someone as an example.

Cindy (F3) also referred to her Korean friend who had taken on all the financial burdens placed on her by her family. Her Korean friend who had to cope with issues of family support was a role model for her.

Like my Korean friend, I’m gonna be that way in a few years too … There is a lot of burden and I have to support my family members they are getting old, they are getting retirement … So seeing her kind of work out her struggle at the same time balancing her life, kind of sets the pace for me, she is another role model, in terms of caring on that family burden … She carries on that a lot of issues proactive about things and she doesn’t complain … Yeah, she is more American but she doesn’t hesitate to go after her to do the duties that’s assigned by our heritage.

Lily (F4) said she had many Korean friends, but she thought her network of Korean friends was not necessarily good for her personal growth. She believed that if she had not been a part of the Korean community at college, she would have developed good friendships with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, which would have helped her grow as a human being.

When I was in college, I only was surrounded by Korean people because my roommate at that time was Korean, and she was the only person that I knew coming from high school … and then the type of people she was hanging out with was all Koreans, so I would just tag along, and that’s how I ended up being surrounded by Korean people all the time. Maybe if I was a little stronger and independent then I could have surrounded by Whites and Blacks, and Hispanics, so I think I would have been well-rounded person.
Joyce (F5) believed that her Korean friend offered positive influences, especially in terms of her Christian faith.

I think that friend I told you about, she is really the one that changed my perspective and I do rely on. We met when I was in 8th grade when I moved to the new middle school, I knew her from 8th grade. I mean we went to different college, but she went through a lot of hard things in her life too, and I think she just changed so drastically, and that really changed my perspective on things, yeah she influenced me a lot.

Jason (M1) had a relationship with three Korean bosses when he was working at a liquor store a few years ago. His bosses were three different types of Koreans in terms of U.S. immigration status. The first type, a second generation Korean American, was born and raised in the United States. The second type, a 1.5 generation Korean American, was born in Korea but immigrated to the U.S. before the age of 10. The third type is a “Korean Korean,” who came to the U.S. as an adult. He pointed out his unique relationship with each one:

A couple of years ago, I worked for a Korean owned wine and liquor store, and I had three bosses. My immediate boss at the store was Korean. He was much Koreanized because he came from Korea when he was probably like late twenties, so he has already a Korean personality that Korean culture influenced and very stubborn … Then my middle boss was born and raised here. He was 100 % Americanized who spoke no Korean. My youngest boss, he was born here and stayed here but he went to Korea a lot, back and forth. So he knows Korea really well and he speaks Korean well, he knows culture really well, both Korean and American culture, so he kind of help me understand situation … I enjoyed working there so much.

Joseph (M2) noted that he had several close Korean friends that he would call brothers. He recalled when they were all young and immature and would cut school and do fun things together. He believed that those years were precious. They matured because of the experiences.

I have Korean friends that I could call brothers who support me in all the time with unfailing love and trust … when I met James and introduced my other friend Teddy, which I met in elementary school, we started cutting school and smoking, and PC 방\textsuperscript{11} and the thing is, if we had to change something in our past, we are never gonna change because that’s who we are today. It gave us wisdom to be out of trouble, it was the ability to see a bad situation coming, so the brotherhood, the fellowship we had, you know, the brothers we always do stuff together and all that.

\textsuperscript{11} PC Bang, a store for computer games.
David (M3) shared a story about how he met many Korean friends when he started going to a Korean church. Meeting Korean friends at church was a big moment when he embraced his Korean heritage.

When I started going to a church and that’s where I found a lot of Korean friends who spoke, who embrace their Korean side and heritage, so through that I was able to kind of realize my Korean heritage myself and get better speaking Korean.

Ethan (M4) reminisced about the day he went to church with his close Korean friend. He felt such a joy and a great feeling of connection when he realized that they could relate to one another.

This was a long time ago, probably when I first went to same church with my best friend … Yeah that was when I got to first interact with people who I can relate with, people who, “wow like I understand this guy, he understands me.” I really was able to feel this strong connection at that point … Probably when I was in 4th or 5th grade I think. That was a peak moment in my childhood. Just that sense of understanding well, such as I can really relate to this guy or these guys, they were very similar to me, and they can put themselves in my shoes, so because of that I really felt good.

2. Asian, Hispanic, Black, and White friendships. Except two women, eight of the youth reported that they had close friends from diverse cultural backgrounds. They described their relationships with non-Korean, non-Asian friends and how multicultural friendships influenced them. They reported that having friends from diverse backgrounds had influenced their perception of Korean and American identity. Alice (F1) revealed that it was difficult to understand a mom who treated a daughter just like a roommate. Alice had been raised by a Korean mother who sacrificed everything for her.

I have this one friend, she is White, she has a pretty decent life, her mom makes good money, but it is really sad when she tells me … her mom basically treats her like a roommate … When she wanted coffee, those little coffee pots for the Keurig machine, and then her mom got mad at her, “Why don’t you go out and buy some coffee for you?” So, she says, “Sure, whatever” and then she opens the cabinet, her mom was hiding some coffee pots for herself … Korean mothers would never do that. It was really weird for me to hear that. There are multiple incidences her mom didn’t act like a mom, which I feel like very common in White families.
Isabella (F2) noted an Italian friend helped her realize the cultural differences between Italians and Koreans, which played an important role in her awareness of her own Korean heritage. In addition, she reported that she had two Black friends who supported her when she was going through hard times during college. She discussed,

Two of my closest friends (who are Black) helped me get through college when I wanted to transfer out, when my grandma passed away, they stuck with me through so much of my life.

Cindy (F3) commented on her Latina friend who was independent to be her own person and that she was the one who influenced her a lot. She discussed that she wanted more and more to be independent which was the opposite of how she was raised in the Korean culture. She added that she had found more comfort in her non-Korean friends. She perceived that her White friend was more understanding even though she had no direct experience of Korean culture. She commented,

I found more comfort in non-Korean friends, my best friends in college is actually, she is White, I felt more connected to non-Korean, non-Asian friends, which is kind of weird, My best friend is White, she understands and even though she may not fully get the picture 100% because she doesn’t have that direct experience, but the fact that she can empathize or at least pretends to empathize, that helped a lot.

Jason (M1) reported that he had had many friends from many different cultures and that he got along with all groups. He did not think people were different especially in groups.

In junior high and high school … I got along with groups of all people. I like having multicultural circle of friends because I don’t know I kind of like, we couldn’t be so different in terms of cultural thoughts and behavior when we are in groups.

Joseph (M2) was similar in that he had a lot of non-Korean friends outside of church.

For me, I don’t really have a lot of Korean friends outside of church. Everything outside all my friends are Italian, German/Polish, Puerto Ricans, just not Asian descent, very multicultural a lot.

Jeremiah (M5) reflected on his many Jewish friends from high school. He believed that he was raised as a whitewashed Korean American because of the influences of those friends.
Ethan (M4) reported on his Mexican American friend who had had the similar identity struggle as he did in junior high school.

I guess I got a friend at that time too, he was a Mexican American, and he went through the same exact thing because he was also Americanized. He kind of questioned his like ethnicity like Hispanic.

3. Important school experiences. School experiences were analyzed to see the role of those experiences in identity development. Important events included: fights among different racial groups in junior and high school, changing schools, experiencing peer pressure, confronting stereotypes toward Asians, participating in Korean cultural events, and so on. Interviewees believed that these experiences had had an effect on their identities. For example, Cindy (F3) recalled a 6th grade experience in which she felt like a clown from a circus team or a monkey putting on a costume. Her school had a cultural event where she had to be put, against her will, on stage wearing Korean traditional clothing. She rejected the event because she did not like to be a part of Korean culture. Yet, she had no choice but to participate as it was the way the people at her school saw her.

In 6th grade, school had a cultural event thing, and they automatically put me for a group of Koreans without asking my consent, other students volunteered, I didn’t volunteer because I didn’t want … They just see me as Korean and they don’t see me as, even the possibility that I’m an American that I might not be familiar with my background … I felt embarrassed and I was angry because I didn’t wanna be a part of my culture … I didn’t really see myself as Korean and the school placed me in that group just because from the rosters, I had Korean ethnicity. I had no choice but to participate, I had to put up stage and did the little 한복12 thing, I hate wearing that … It kind of, back in early nineteen hundred where they place people weird in terms of society’s eyes, and they put them in circus for show and tell, that’s how I felt like … I felt like a little monkey put in a costume. It’s like, ‘hey she looks different, she is not one of us, look what she wears, and this is gonna be a part of our diversity.’ I did really hated that, and even till this day.

Lily (F4) found high school was the time for her to figure out which group she would best fit in after she moved to a new town, Port Washington, for high school. She did not hang out

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12 Han-Bok, which means Korean traditional clothing.
with Koreans at school until she became a junior. She perceived that her new school environment had an effect on her.

When I moved to Port Washington, in that town most of the kids, they grew up together and I came in after everybody is pretty much all grown up. So I guess that was the time for me to discover what kind of group that I fit in the best and honestly I didn’t hang out with the Korean people from the beginning, only until later on may be junior or senior year, it was when I started hanging out with them.

Joyce (F5) talked about the influence her early school years had on her personality and habits. As an immigrant she had to spend time just observing and listening to others at school. She developed quiet personality traits in social contexts.

When I was young, I was a quiet student, and I think that does carry out until now, I think that did have an influence because I moved from a new country and I was learning the language and I spent a lot of time, I spent a lot of time listening and observing … Like in new social situations, instead of being the first one who speak, I would always listen and observe first, which I think influenced me a lot.

Jason (M1) discussed his school experiences in terms of confronting racism and many fights among different groups of people during high school, yet he did not get involved in those fights as he had friends from diverse cultures.

I went to Bayside high school which, it wasn’t too bad, we started with just a group of people … Once the African American kids came in, they were trying to show off their alpha male, they were just trying to be top of the school, so they got into a lot of fights with other races, Chinese, Koreans, and Whites. I think I avoided that a lot because I had a lot of different cultural friends, I had a lot of Black friends too … We were still young, we were still immature, and we don’t really know how to act as adults when it comes to race, culture, and just different life styles of people, so there was still a lot of racism.

David (M3) looked back on his school years when his close friend at that time forced him into fights. He described how the peer pressure was at school. As he did not want to fight anyone, he stopped being friends with him.

I think it would be going on to high school, I was a bit with the wrong crowd in middle school, my closest friend at the time, and he did some questionable things. But then he accused of me not wanting to fight anyone, and then, I said I didn’t want to fight anyone, and he said ‘if you didn’t fight, we are not friends’ and I said, ‘we are not friends.’ So, I mean that was good because I was able to branch off.
Jeremiah (M5) also reported on how high school peer pressure affected him. During his high school, a group of friends from his middle school forced him to try drugs but there was another group of friends that insisted on him not doing it.

I guess, there is this one small group of people around my age in high school that were close friends in middle school … I feel like those people sort of negatively impacted because they were trying to influence like peer pressured me to do those kind of things, yeah so that was a negative. I mean I would always come back to being faithful with God and a lot of my other friends also told me like “don’t do it,” so even though there was peer pressure, there was also peer pressure on not to do it.

Ethan (M4) went through tough years at schools. He faced many challenges while switching from private to public schools. The ethnic composition of the schools and neighborhood was an important factor in his school experiences, and switching schools affected his identity.

I remember going to a lot of private schools along with my brother throughout all elementary and middle school. In our private school, it was mostly White. It was very different because we weren’t like the other kids, so we were very standing out, we were the only “Yellow” in the crowd among all the White … We didn’t really get into that much trouble because of that … It wasn’t really tough until we started going to public schools when I was in third grade. We went to public schools from then on, and it was way more diverse, we were not just only Asian students in the crowd anymore.

Ethan (M4) added,

I went to Francis Lewis High school, so there were a lot of Asians there and that’s when it got really easy. There was just only other people I could relate to, they would be more understanding because a lot of them are in the same situation too. A lot of like Chinese American, Filipino American, there are a lot of those in my school too. So, I guess we were gonna kind of going through the same thing, so I guess we kind of understood each other in some sense.

In his sophomore year in high school Jeremiah (M5) began befriending non-Asians.

I guess I was a sophomore when I finally started to fit in … I didn’t really start being outgoing until sophomore year when I actually made like a lot of nice people, I was able to be friends with mostly everyone in my grade, so yeah … There were a few Asians or a few Koreans, so I would mostly associate with the Asians, but then sophomore year was when I started engaging with the other, like with non-Asians, yeah.
4. Korean church experiences. The Korean church is unique in terms of its cohesiveness and its role in the lives of Korean Christians. Many Koreans in New York have experiences of attending Korean churches as a way of connecting with other Koreans. Eight out of the ten youth were recruited for this study from a Korean church in Queens, New York. So, I looked into how the youth perceived the role of the Korean church in their identity development. Two women (F3 and F4) were not church attenders at the time of the interview. Cindy (F3), however, attended church to meet Korean friends, even though she described herself as an atheist. Yet, it did not work for her, and she could not make Korean friends even at church. She said,

I didn’t grow up in a church, that’s typical of a lot of Korean Americans, and that I was an only child and I went to school but I really didn’t interact with other Korean kids. If I don’t go to church, they also kind of isolate me too, so it was kind of that … There were times where I did try to go to church with my friends, but never worked out, there were just a part of me where like “no it’s just not me” kind of thing.

The majority of the youth reported that the Korean church had supported them and their family in times of difficulty. More important, they met most of their Korean friends in church. They recalled many empowering church experiences and support from church people. Thus, they perceived that Korean church was an important context for them to develop and strengthen their Korean identity. For example, Alice (F1) got a lot of help from her church and pastor when her father suddenly passed away. She had been away from church, but her father’s death was the reason she returned.

The reason why I went back to church was largely because of my dad when he passed away, the church helped me a lot … It was just like 목사님13 did a lot for me, like I repay back even a half of what he did for me. I was attending church again.

Isabella’s (F2) church pastor had helped her find God in every aspect of her life.

I have moved to connect with the ministry of the Korean church that I attend, I think largely the pastor, the English ministry pastor, and he has helped me to find God in every aspect of my life.

13 Mok-Sa-Nim, which means pastor.
Jason (M1) was not doing well in his high school years. During that time, he met a mentor from church who was different from his school teachers. The mentor showed and taught him many of life lessons especially how to live according to Christian principles:

I was a big mess in high school and the teachers just point fingers at me and tell me what I did wrong but my mentor from the church, he was very different … He understood what I was going through … He showed me through kindness and love and not being angry with me, having a lot of patience, he really showed me what Christianity is really about … I still have relationship with him. When I need guidance from someone who is older than me, I usually go to him.

Jason (M1) believed that church had played a significant role, making him a better person. He thought that he would have done much worse things had he not attended a church.

I have always been to church. I guess I don’t really notice too much about how church helped me, but I know it does. If I didn’t go church, I wouldn’t be as forgiving, understanding of certain people, I would be doing a lot more irresponsible things, so I am pretty sure church helped me in a way to kind of help me my self-control and just being a better person alone.

Joseph (M2) was among the youth that were very religious. He believed that the people from the Korean churches he had attended provided him with much love and comfort, which he was desperately searching for as a child who had grown up in a broken family.

Through all discovering myself in childhood, I think church did a very big role even till this day because church is where I found comfort, so especially witnessing a lot of 장로님들,14 the deacons and the elders and the pastors … So a lot of caring and a lot of warmth, because I wouldn’t get the attention through my childhood but thankfully, they all showed compassions to me.

David (M3) could make a lot of Korean friends only after he started going to a Korean church. Through this experience, he accepted his Korean heritage and began embracing both his American and Korean identity.

In high school, I started going to a church and that’s where I found a lot of Korean friends who embrace their Korean side and heritage, so through that I was able to realize my Korean heritage myself and get better speaking Korean because I couldn’t speak Korean at all. That’s when I think I realized that though I am an American-born citizen, I

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14 Jang-Ro-Nim-Deul, which means elders at church.
still consider myself Korean as well ... I don’t like all my Korean heritage, so I kind of like the idea of being a Korean American, so I can embrace both sides.

Ethan (M4) believed the church influenced him positively, especially the older people who had gone through much hardship in life.

Digging back, I actually did have a lot of positive influences and I really thank God for that, because most of it was from the church ... It would have to always be someone older, someone I just look up to ‘he or she has been through so much more than I have’ you know, how they dealt with it ... Just those kinds of people really kind of shaped who I am today and how they dealt with things, having patience especially from a Christian’s standpoint and those people have to be all from the church.

Jeremiah’s (M5) father was diagnosed with a Parkinson’s disease and because of that he and his family struggled. He felt he had been able to overcome those hard times thanks to support from church people.

During the junior year, I had a lot of help from my friends and from my church ... I felt like because of that they made me open up my eyes more to accept negative events like this to happen and to learn from them ... I felt like I learned a lot.

F. Ethnic Behaviors and Practices: Acting Korean or Acting American?

Ethnic behaviors and practices were coded to discern whether the Korean youth were making efforts to practice their Korean identity. Specifically, I wanted to see whether respondents had tried acting Korean or American in their lives. Alice (F1) reported that she was Americanized, and thus she imitated her White friends’ behavior. Now, she feels differently:

I thought I acted very blunt because I liked the things White kids liked, and the way I talked were similar to them, and ... I do admit when I was in high school, I feel like I tried a little harder to be more White, I don’t know why, but now that I am older, I just like, I don’t know there are really somethings I come to realize about super-White people that I don’t really like.

To analyze ethnic behaviors and practices, I looked into six subcategories: (1) efforts to learn Korean history, traditions, and customs; (2) understanding and retaining Korean values, manners, and uniquely Korean things; (3) efforts to learn the Korean language; (4) South Korean visits and related experiences; (5) Korean mass media culture consumption—listening to K-pop
music, watching Korean TV shows, or following Korean fashion style; and (6) preferences for Korean food.

1. Efforts to learn Korean history, traditions, and customs. Most of the youth reported that they had made efforts to learn Korean history, traditions, and customs. The youth’s learning of Korean culture and history was associated with a variety of life experiences: the death of a family member, visiting South Korea, attending Korean schools on Saturdays, and living with grandparents who taught them those things. For instance, Alice (F1) reported that she had learned much about Korean culture after her dad’s sudden death.

   My dad’s death impacted me a lot. Through this experience … I had to take care of a lot of stuff. In that way, I learned a lot about myself like Korean cultural stuff. I feel like it was a time for me to learn to become independent because of that event.

   Jeremiah (M5) discussed his efforts to learn about Korean culture and history.

   I tried to immerse myself in Korean culture a little bit, be able to learn a little, like overstepped the boundary a little bit and like explore like learn more about Korean culture and the history.

2. Understanding and retaining Korean values, manners, and uniquely Korean things. Most of the youth reported that they had lived with Korean values even if they were born and raised in the U.S. Nine out of the ten youth shared episodes related to Korean values. They expressed what they liked and disliked about Korean values. Alice (F1) felt very Korean when she realized she was following Koreans values. She commented what she liked about them:

   I feel like I am still really Korean when I so follow the values, just like traditions, like when you talk to an older person, and always being respectful, which I think is amazing, I’m glad I still have those values instilled within me, because I feel like it’s common etiquette that a lot of people lack, yeah. Like 버스 타면,15 they don’t even get out. Its Korean values that I like.

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15 *Bus-Ta-Meon*, which means “when getting on a bus.”
Alice (F1) recalled, when she was a little girl, her experience learning basic Korean manners for the first time such as how to greet somebody over the phone especially how to talk to older people.

This is when I first started getting to know Korean manners, you know, 인사하는거,16 not talking back to adults stuff like that … One day I had to call my mom at the stores she was working at, then the person who picked up would be the manager … I was like, ‘Can I speak to my mom?’ which was totally casual if you were to talk to an American person, but too harsh she thought that was the rudest thing ever. So that’s when I first learned about how to speak to a Korean elderly people. In this case, specifically over phone calls, she was like, ‘you should say, 안녕하세요? 제 이름은, whatever, can I talk to my mom?, Thank you’ as opposed to ‘Hi, can I talk to my mom?’ I remember that because I got in a lot of trouble for that. It wasn’t even for my mom, it was her coworker. Her coworker taught me how to do that.

Alice (F1) also commented that she did not like the fact that many Korean values are very family-oriented, which she feels are too much. She considers herself an independent person.

You know, a lot of Korean values are too very family-oriented, I just feel sometimes I can’t take of it on my own. There are a lot of things I had to take care of by myself. Family wise, I don’t know how to explain it, I felt more independent, I don’t rely on my family as much, which I feel like super core value in Korean culture.

Isabella (F2) described Korean values that she did not like. When she was visiting Korea for six months in her junior year of college, she learned many things about Korea, and she felt that some of the values were hard to understand.

When I was studying in Korea, I did become more skeptical about Korean culture and being a Korean because obviously there are some things that I can’t understand like the fact that it is very inclusive culture … For example, our director told us if you go out to drink, the native Koreans are going to be very push about you drinking because they have a mentality that if you are not drinking, that means you are not having fun, so everyone needs to be doing the same thing together. But in America, that’s not the case at all. Yeah your friend might push you to drink, but if you are really like, “no, I really don’t want to” they will leave you alone eventually, so “inclusive” in that sense.

Isabella (F2) also commented that, seeing only the faces of Koreans or Asians in their country, Koreans seemed to appreciate just one type of beauty. They would get plastic surgery to

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16 In-Sa-Ha-Neun-Go, which means “how to greet somebody.”
17 An-Neong-Ha-Se-Yo, which means “how do you do?”
18 Je-E-Reum-Eun, which means “my name is.”
look prettier to follow just that typical beauty. Because she was born and raised in America and had been exposed to so much diversity, she was able to realize how different her thinking was from the thinking of Koreans in Korea.

Koreans also have this kind of mentality like there’s only one type of beauty, you can only act this way and that’s considered like correct or normal, but being born and raised in America and just being amongst so much diversity, like in Korea 99% if not 99.9% of the people, they are all Korean, you see only Asian faces, but in the U.S., that’s not the case … I was able to understand after I studied in Korea, Koreans don’t get plastic surgery because they think they are ugly, they get it to look prettier while Americans understand it as or as myself, I understood it as, “if you think I am ugly, I need to get it.”

Cindy (F3) reported that she still did not understand or accept Korean values and culture even though she had made lots of efforts to do so. In an episode she shared, she felt that she had an American mentality, so she had no problem with being vocal whatever issue she had. But for Koreans, especially for Korean men, it was a thing when they felt challenged, which they did not like. Thus, she believed that her fluency in Korean did not seem to work for her to mentally connect with the Koreans.

I think being verbally fluent is different in terms of connecting with someone mentally because even if I spoke full Korean, my mentality wasn’t Korean for them. And since I don’t have problem with being vocal whatever issue that I had, I would express verbally, and for them, they don’t like the challenge. For me, if I have an issue, then I will say it, that’s what we were taught here. It was like because I am fluent verbally and in writing or in terms of communication in Korean. They just assume that I am one of them, but my mentality is no … So, I don’t have a problem verbally expressing issues, but in Korean cultures, especially to men, it’s like, “oh who do you think you are?” kind of thing.

Cindy (F3) talked about her family conflict when she was mentally ill during high school years. In her time of difficulty, she confronted even bigger problems when her family adhered to Korean values in a way that she could not understand:

I had a mental breakdown around junior high school going into high school, and I guess now it is considered depression, but back then I didn’t know what it was, all I knew was that I just had a lot of anger. So the school had recommended that I come see a consistent counselor to help work out my anger issues, and that’s when my family intervened and say, “no, that goes against our cultural, she just doing it for attention, she can work this out, this is not worth, and it’s embarrassing to have her scene going into clinics,” that was really the reaction and they pulled me out from that ... So the alternative was to seeing the
school counselor instead, but even then, it was like ‘what if other Korean students find out that you are going through with this?’... Even when I needed help, that I needed somebody to guide through my confusion, but there comes my family with their Korean, very conservative, by saying, “no, this is taboo, she is not crazy.” ... I felt like I don’t care what you think, I think I need help, but for them, I don’t care if you need help, I care about what other people think. It’s like, “who cares other people think?”

She shared an episode in which the mother of her ex-boyfriend, who was Korean, embarrassed her. It involved a custom of Korean dating, i.e., in Korean culture, when children start dating someone, they meet the parents of their boyfriend or girlfriend, where many awkward questions are asked and answered. She recalled the many personal questions:

I think it was when I met with my ex-boyfriend’s parents. So, he was also Korean American, born here and raised here, second generation too, and we were dating for a while and it got a time to meet parents. I mean I guess the way they kind of questioned me was kind of too personal... He was a pastor’s kid too, so his dad was a pastor, his mom was the 사모님 and I met them... And I guess the way she came off, it’s like she wanted the typical Korean housewife kind of standard, and that wasn’t me... you know, I am just his girlfriend, and you are kind of putting me in a situation like I kind of have to take care of that boy, it was very uncomfortable, 미래며느리, kind of thing... So it was just one of those really bad experiences I think.

Lily (F4) described situations in which her mother was unhappy and fought with her father, yet her mother would not divorce him. She believed that it was her Korean values that prevented a divorce because Korean mothers want their children to grow up with a father figure.

I couldn’t help but say because I didn’t understand why my mom lives with somebody who makes her unhappy, but then she was saying, if my mom was an American then she would have done so, but then she said, if she didn’t have me and my brother, then she would probably have divorced him, but then she didn’t want us to grow up without a dad so. If it were me then I would have divorced my husband, I don’t know I guess it’s a Korean thing, yeah.

Lily (F4) also realized how important family was in Korean culture when, while she was away for college, her grandmother was sick:

I guess when I realized my grandma was sick, that’s when I realized that even though I came to college and I was away from my family like I had to, I couldn’t only be thinking

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19 **Sa-Mo-Nim**, which means a pastor’s wife in this context. Usually, the word is used as a respectful expression to refer to an authority figure’s wife.

20 **Mi-Rae-Meo-Nui-Ri**, which means a future daughter-in-law.
about myself because even though school is important, I think family is important, too, especially in Korean culture.

Lily (F4) talked about first child favoritism in Korean culture. As she was her grandmother’s first granddaughter, she received the most love and attention.

At the time I was the first and only grandchild, so I know even though she says she loves all her grandchildren, I’m her first, so I think all cultures must have it but specifically Korean culture like you know, they have that so.

Jason (M1) discussed the many differences between American and Korean culture.

There is a lot of examples, I think Asians when they speak, if you are older or you speak to a senior, you are gonna kind of not look at their eyes, that’s respects, but in America, you have to look into each other’s eyes when you speak or it’s disrespectful if you don’t look at their eyes. It makes them feel awkward.

David (M3) remembered his parents calling him Cheong-Gae-Gu-Ri when he was younger. Blue frog, is a character in a traditional Korean children’s story. In the story, he did not listen to his parents and did exactly the opposite of what his parents had asked him to do while they were alive, but he regretted and cried a lot after the parents passed away. David remembered being called Cheong-Gae-Gu-Ri because he was a mischievous boy.

For childhood scene, since I was forced to go church by my mom and my dad, now that I see it was great, but at the time, I had a lot of rage, I had a very bad anger problem as a child, so I would go up for attention just do bad things at church, just kind of like mess up, I just did something just for the mess up, they just called me 청개구리 [Cheong-Gae-Gu-Ri] a lot, she just called me that a lot. That was me, I would get into a lot of problems, my mom was good but I was bad.

Jeremiah (M5) explained how his parents raised him and the stories they used to tell him about the history of Korea and the economic conditions after the Korean War. He believed that those stories influenced him a lot growing up.

My parents would always mention their story, because I’m a late born child of my parents who lived through the Korean War and Post-Korean War, so they would always talk about the horrible situations they were in, the three hour walk to school every day and the lack of food and everything, so I feel like because of that and the explanations about their lives made me more understanding of other people, even though I grew up in a very wealthy family.
3. Efforts to learn the Korean language. Despite different levels of Korean fluency, all the youth made efforts to speak Korean better. They all reported that Korean was used at home while growing up, so they understood Korean better than they spoke it. The majority of the youth also attended Korean schools on Saturdays. Each respondent perceived the importance of learning and speaking Korean to be identified as Koreans. There is a saying in Korean that all the interviewees knew, “You should speak Korean, if you think you are Korean.” A few youth reported that their Korean identity were strengthened after they improved their Korean. Several, however, reported that, lacking full conversation fluency, they had problems communicating with parents. Alice (F1) expressed this difficulty most often:

> English is my first language, Korean is kind of hard for me to express a lot of my emotions, that’s why like when I communicate with my parents, it’s very difficult for me because the language barrier, so I find it out very frustrating, yeah now that my interest in the Korean culture as just kind of lessened, my Korean also is getting worse.

Jason (M1), who spoke only Korean at home, had worked hard to speak Korean better.

> I made a lot of efforts to learn Korean and I speak it fluently, because my whole family is Korean living in the house, we spoke Korean at home, so I almost only got to speak English outside.

Joseph (M2) explained that learning Korean at home involved strict rules. He also had to attend a Saturday school to learn Korean, which he did not like at that time, but now believes made him fluent.

> My mom used to borrow a lot of Korean shows from 비디오 가게 a lot of Korean shows definitely helped me, too … I also attended a Saturday Korean school against my will. My mom said, “just go, you are gonna need it.” … now I look back at it, I am just like, “oh, I really needed it” because a lot of my friends that I knew growing up, they forgot a lot of Korean words, and which I still have, retain, and I can speak with my mom fluently in conversation … Growing up, there was a rule, no English in the house, only Korean. And if I spoke English, there would be 맘매, I would get hit. It was very strict.

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21 *Video-Ga-Gae*, which is a video rental store.
22 *Maem-Mae*, which means “spanking on the calves.”
David (M3) reported that he barely spoke Korean when he was young, even though his family spoke Korean at home.

We spoke Korean at home, but my Korean was really bad, I could barely speak and then I made up a lot of Korean words but only my mom would understand them.

4. South Korean visits and related experiences. Most respondents reported that they had visited South Korea or had lived there for a few years. One woman (F1) and one man (M1) reported never having visited South Korea. Three women reported that they had realized how Americanized they were when they stayed in Korea. They commented that Koreans in Korea perceived them as Americans not as Koreans and that it influenced their realization of their American identity. For example, Isabella (F2) described how Americanized she felt in Korea.

When I studied abroad in South Korea in my junior year of college, that’s when I really got to understand what being an American means and what being a Korean means ... It made me realize how Americanized actually I am as opposed to being Koreanized.

Isabella (F2) believed that those experiences she had had in Korea were an important awakening making her aware that she did not want to define her identity by her looks.

When I studied abroad, two of my friends actually that I met in Korea, both of them got plastic surgery for their eyes. While I was there I was so shocked, but I guess for me, that whole experience was positive because the fact that I was so shocked by the idea was of reassurance to myself, I don’t find my identity in my looks, I am more than that ... I truly believe God made me the way I am, I have no right to change it, so that was a highlight for myself being able to I guess lean on God and stick with my refusal to get plastic surgery.

Cindy (F3) reported a negative experience while visiting South Korea with her mom. She felt that people in Korea were not welcoming. She felt hurt by the people she met there. She believed that her visit made her more skeptical about her Korean identity.

That was also the year when I went to Korea for summer, and I didn’t really get a good sense of welcoming feeling from people, they kind of looked at me, “oh you speak English, you think you are better than me” kind of attitude, but all I said was “no, like I am just visiting from the States” and automatically they just kind of get that, “oh so you think you are better than us” kind of thing, so I think I don’t know the word in English
but like they target their 자격지심23 towards the person that, yeah, so “why I am the victim? I don’t have to be the victim.” I didn’t do anything ... When I met with my friends, we went to movies and we spoke English whole time and people who pass by were like, “재네들 왜 저래?”24 kind of thing, it’s like, “why are you judging me?” “Don’t assume that I am like you” kind of thing.

Cindy (F3) added:

I think the whole plane back, I told my mom I am never going to Korea again. She understands that a little bit, but she doesn’t understand why I got so adamant about never wanting to associate myself with these people in Korea again. Yeah, I think I got a lot, I think I was a bit hurt, like I grew up trying to fit it into one group another and already like that impression that I got was “you are not a part of us.”

Lily (F4) talked about her looking American to Koreans in Korea. Through that experience, she realized that she would not be seen as a Korean to Koreans in Korea due to the subtle difference people recognize. Yet, she perceived it as being cool not as something bad.

When I go to Korea I can tell, like people in Korea can tell that I wasn’t born in Korea because there is subtle difference, so even though you can’t pick at it and say it’s exactly this, but it’s just the feeling because, and I think it’s true because what I would eat is different, like just everything, the air I breathe is different, so even though it’s the same Korean person, it’s not really looks or like little different and so yeah I think that’s like pretty cool.

5. Korean mass media consumption. Korean mass media consumption was analyzed as an important component of ethnic behaviors and practices. I wanted to see specifically whether interviewees had enjoyed listening to Korean pop music or watching Korean TV shows while growing up. I was interested in the effect of exposure to Korean mass media on identity perception. A few youth reported on consuming Korean popular culture. Many, however, reported they were not into Korean shows or K-pop music anymore. None reported on following Korean style fashion or clothing. Alice (F1) stated that she used to listen to K-pop music but not anymore. She considered herself much more Americanized.

23 Ja-Geok-Ji-Sim, which is similar in meaning to feelings of inferiority, but not exactly.
24 Jae-Nae-Deul-Wae-Jeo-Rae, which means “why are they acting like that?”
Me and my friend are super-Americanized, we don’t really keep up with Korean culture, I would say Korean media culture, we don’t follow that. I like all kinds of music, but I don’t like Korean music anymore. I used to like K-pop but not anymore.

Lily (F4) found herself completely changed after she accepted Korean heritage on her own. She said that she was not a TV lover, but now she searches for Korean shows on the Internet and enjoys watching them. She was the only woman who liked Korean shows, and she often watched them.

I was never really like a TV lover, but when I kind of accepted more of my Korean identity, it moved on to more looking out for Korean shows on the Internet, so before when I used to be like particular channels on TV, later half, it would be just like me actually looking out for like Korean shows on the internet and I mean I was never really obsessed with TV but then I do realize that the latter half of my life, the TV shows I would watch on the internet were always Korean programs, so yeah.

Among the men, Joseph (M2) and Jeremiah (M5) talked about their experiences with Korean mass media culture. Joseph reported that he watched a lot of Korean shows growing up. Jeremiah also said that he used to listen to K-pop music to learn about Korean culture.

6. Preferences for Korean food. The youth’s preferences for food were analyzed as the last subcategory of ethnic behaviors and practices. There is a saying in Korean, “한국사람은 한국음식을 먹어야해,” which means that Koreans should eat Korean food. Not all Koreans like Korean food. The findings showed that the majority of the youth ate Korean food at home while growing up and liked Korean food; a few youth, however, reported they preferred American or other types of food. The youth showed a variety of preferences for many different types of food. One woman (F3) reported that she did not like Korean food. Not surprisingly, she struggled most with her identity and was in denial of her Korean identity at the time of the interview.

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25 A common expression among Koreans, Han-Guk-Sa-Ram-Eun-Han-Guk-Eum-Sik-Eul-Meok-Eo-Ya-Hae means that Koreans should eat Korean food.
G. Changes in Identity Perception: Korean or American or Both?

The life stories of the Korean youth revealed that their identity had evolved from early childhood till the present. At the start of each interview, they briefly described life chapters and provided me with a key word to summarize each chapter of their life stories. They followed the order of early childhood, elementary school years, junior and high school years, and college to the present in the description of life stories. Depending on the age of the participant, younger youth such as M3 (age 18), M4 (age 20), and M5 (age 19) reported fewer adult experiences. They had recently graduated from high school and only just become adult, whereas M1 (age 29) and M2 (age 27) reported many life episodes in their twenties. In addition, the older respondents reported much deeper thoughts and varied experiences in life than the younger youth.

Five of the participants were college students at the time of the interviews. Accordingly, the majority of interviewees devoted much of their interviews on their high school and college experiences. They believed that they had changed considerably in how they perceived their identities. Most youth experienced significant changes in their perception of Korean and American identity in junior or high school years. Thus, I wanted to see how their perception of identity had evolved over time in three subcategories: (1) time of major changes (turning points) in the perception of Korean (ethnic), Asian (racial), or American (national) identities; (2) experiences of identity conflict between Korean and American identities; and (3) perceptions or feelings of current identity statuses.

1. When did major changes occur? Life stories revealed that most respondents went through important changes in identity perception during junior and high school years. Two women (F2 and F4) and three men (M2, M3, and M5) reported that they had had turning points in high school. One woman (F1) and one man (M4) reported experiencing turning points during
junior high school. One man (M1) and one woman (F5) reported that they had experienced a turning point a bit later in college. The last one woman (F3) stated that her struggle with identity issues was ongoing and that she did not have any changes so far. Cindy (F3) reported:

> Right now I feel like I’m on a treadmill. I would put it that way. I’m always running, I’m always trying to search for things, but I’m not really going anywhere, and I’m just in the same environment, really same room where if I leave the door I’m gonna be American, but if I come back to the door, I’m gonna be Korean.

Except for this woman, nine out of ten reported that they had had identity turning points. Their turning points were associated with a variety of factors such as moving to a different neighborhood, meeting a Korean friend for the first time in life, facing different school environments, confronting racism and bullying, or having life changing religious experiences.

Two women reported that their turning point involved moving to a new environment. For example, Alice’s (F1) turning point was when she moved to a new predominantly White neighborhood where she made Jewish friends who prompted changes in her view of herself.

> When I was in the seventh grade, I moved to Forest Hills, Rego Park area. I think that was a turning point in my life, in the way I identified myself as. That’s when I started getting exposed to my Jewish friends and you know, just more exposure to the White community … I enjoyed my life better in that neighborhood.

Isabella’s (F2) turning point occurred when she moved to New York at the beginning of high school. She met many Korean friends after moving, which awakened her to her Korean heritage.

> After I moved to New York, which was after my freshman year of high school, that’s when I actually really started to accept my Korean values and just the Korean part of myself because when I moved to New York, there was a lot more Koreans that I was interacting with … So, more and more I became familiarized with Korean heritage.

Lily’s (F4) turning point was in high school when she accepted her Korean heritage not because of the insistence of her parents but because of her own realization.

> In high school, freshman and sophomore year was when I hung out with non-Koreans and then later on I guess I kind grew up and started accepting and taking in more of the
Korean culture in my own will because before it was just my parents tried to push me into accepting it, but later on I realized that, that was when I was comfortable with.

Jason (M1) reported that when he spoke with his Korean boss at work in his early twenties was an important moment for his perception of Asian and Korean identity.

My Korean boss at the liquor store really ignited the flame in my heart showing that no matter what people are gonna see me an American, they are gonna see me Asians, he gave me a really good example … That would be a turning point for me kind of accepting more that I am a Korean.

Ethan’s (M4) high school years involved struggles with his American identity. After that, he realized he was a Korean not an American.

High school, probably start to accept myself as a Korean, that’s probably where because in freshman year I was still thinking ‘oh I am an American, American’ throughout like halfway throughout high school, I started thinking, “no, I am not an American” so probably I realized, like the realization at that point in high school.

Jeremiah (M5) experienced identity changes during his high school, though he did not have much of a struggle. He fit in at school and became popular after exploring possibilities.

Starting adolescence, went to hit puberty, I guess a lot of things changed, so I started becoming more open to world, but then tried to explore more to see what really fit me especially tried to fit in school and I was able to, I was fortunate to become pretty popular I guess, so I felt like I started to fit in.

The turning point of several youth was related to their church experiences. For instance, when David (M3) started attending a Korean church where he met many Korean friends he felt he had had a turning point.

I think my turning point would have been the first year in high school when I started going to a church, everyone’s Korean there, that’s when I started to realize my Korean heritage … That’s when I truly accepted, “I am Korean American.”

Joseph (M2) felt he had two turning points: the first was during high school when he started playing all the time and not studying at all. The second took place when he returned to church, which made him a better person.
My first turning point was in high school, when I became a bookworm to a kid who just wants to play, 개구장이 who just wanna play all the time of course cutting school and all that and it was fun. The second turning point was when I came back to church. Everything then changed for the better.

Joyce (F5) reported her turning point in association with her religious identity unlike the other youth. She went through identity struggles in high school, but her turning point was when she converted to Christianity in college. Joyce (F5) said:

I think in high school, I was just trying to figure out my identity, and my parents got divorced when I was sophomore in high school, so I think just me figuring out my life, my friends, my education and then thinking about family stuff at the same time. Then in college when I accepted Jesus Christ as my savior, that is the biggest change in my life.

2. Experiences of identity conflict. Most of the Korean youth stated that they had figured out who they were after some struggle with their identity. Yet, Cindy (F3) and Ethan (M4) reported that they had gone through tough times while struggling. Cindy’s (F3) case was ongoing. The youth’s struggle with identity was analyzed in light of the youth’s citizenship. In other words, I wanted to see whether the youth’s citizenship influenced their identity. Four women (F1, F2, F3, and F4) and three men (M1, M2, and M3) were U.S. citizens. Among the remaining three, Joyce (F5) and Joseph (M2) had Korean citizenship and Ethan (M4) had Argentine citizenship. Ethan’s (M4) case was unusual in that he was born in Argentina but was living in the U.S. as a Korean. He reported that he had had many identity struggles growing up as his national identity, racial identity, and ethnic identity conflicted all through his school years.

Ethan (M4) recalled:

I really started thinking who I was as a person as well as I was really struggling because I lived most of my life here, I thought myself as an American, that’s when I was in middle school, I thought I was “oh I am an American, boom,” but thing is I wasn’t an American, I am not a citizen here, so that’s that who I was, I am a Korean … I was thinking I am not an American, I am a Korean and that’s when it really started hit me in high school. I got it really easy when I started changing my mind like that.

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26 Gae-Gu-Jang-E, which means a naughty child.
Jeremiah (M5) was born in the U.S. He reported that in his adolescence, he had experienced conflict between being a Korean at home and being a Korean American at school. He reflected on those days he was struggling to figure out what it meant to live as a Korean American in the United States:

Even though I’m Korean, and even though I do know some history about Korea, there was a lot of social problems with being a Korean American, so there is this borderline where being a Korean was at home and being a Korean American was at school, and that sort of conflicted with my adolescence stage, and there is a lot of problems with the living of a Korean but growing up in America and being able to learn the language, being able to read and write and everything.

Cindy (F3) was also a U.S. citizen but had a tough conflict with her Korean or American identity. She had many sad moments in life and felt that she was isolated from both groups.

I thought I was an American, but kids here don’t see me as an American, they see me as a foreigner, but in terms of Korean society, they don’t see me as a Korean because they consider me too Americanized. In both groups, I kind of felt isolated, and a part of it was my choice, and a part of it was my reactions to their perceptions of me.

3. Perception or feelings of current identity statuses. The majority of the Korean youth reported feeling comfortable with respect to their identity at the time of the interview. They felt settled after they accepted their Korean and American identities. Most men reported positive feelings. For example, Jason (M1) expounded on his situation:

Identity-wise I was always comfortable, I am a Korean American and nothing is going to change that … I was always proud to be who I was … In my mind, my outer self, my mentality, my thoughts, and my experiences have always been an American, so I see myself as an American but I am an Asian first in my first look and an American.

David (M3) had never been bothered by uncertainty about being Korean or American. He felt comfortable with his Korean American identity.

I am a Korean American. Though I am an American-born citizen I still consider myself Korean as well. It didn’t really bother me if I was American or a Korean when I was younger.

Ethan (M4) believed that things turned out to be much easier after he had struggled with identity issues. He appeared comfortable with his identity.
I guess I kind of embraced the fact that I am Korean, no matter how much I try to run away … no matter like where I go, I will still be Korean, so I just kind of accepted that. Because I accepted that I think it got a lot easier for me in high school.

None of the women explicitly expressed positive feelings regarding their identity. They just seemed to feel secure with identity issues. For example, Isabella (F2) said that she embraced her Korean identity though she did not like some Korean values. Alice (F1) acknowledged that she was Americanized even if she knew that she carried a lot of Korean values and that people would see her as an Asian.

I’m super Americanized, but I know people would perceive me as Asian, and also I still have a lot of Korean values.

Yet, Cindy (F3) was still in denial of her Korean heritage and she expressed negative feelings multiple times in her interview narratives. She reported that she had never figured out whether she was a Korean or an American. Thus, her struggle was ongoing.

I guess now it’s more like denial of my ethnicity in a way because I don’t really fit in. It’s like logically I know it, emotionally I know it, you know paper-wise I know it, but in terms of having that level of empathetic connection, I don’t have that. It’s like it is what it is, what more can I do about it, it kind of like in denial, my ethnicity it’s like, I don’t feel that any relation to it.

Cindy (F3) added,

I am definitely not Korean, and now trying to find my ways to fit in the American society where I can best fit in, so I decided you know, ‘let’s forget about this racial wise, because clearly it does not work black and white, so that was a moment I decided, okay so Korean thing isn’t for me, so what’s my next plan? What’s my next group that I can fit into?

H. Prejudices and Discrimination

Several youth reported that they had experienced racial prejudice and discrimination and that they felt these experiences affected their identity formation. I explored interview transcripts using seven subcategories for the analysis of this code: (1) pressure to conform to model minority stereotype; (2) American stereotypes toward Asians; (3) racism and bullying experiences; (4) thoughts on societal images of Koreans in the United States; (5) racism among
Koreans; (6) the use of racial and ethnic labels or epithet-related experiences; and (7) pride in being Korean Americans.

1. **Model minority stereotype as a pressure.** The majority of the Korean youth frequently reported the pressure to conform to the model minority stereotype. Model minority pressure was common, especially regarding school and career choice issues. Several youth perceived it as a burden that constantly affected the way they thought about themselves and their future. For example, Alice (F1) reported disappointment at not getting into an Ivy League school:

   I felt crappy when I didn’t get into an Ivy League school. Most my friends go to pretty good schools like NYU, Cornell, Columbia. Then they ask me, “what school do you go to?” Not that Hunter is a bad school but obviously it looks bad next to Columbia. That was a constant thing I felt in my college years, it makes me feel crappy, which is like the Model minority.

   Isabella (F2) talked about how hard it was to cope with what others thought about her failure. She was under lots of pressure due to expectation from those around her:

   Yeah just being able to have that focus and end goal I think, part of me has that kind of fear of caring what others think and not being able to deal with failure, but it’s not even my own self, it’s more so not being able to deal with others seeing my failure.

   Cindy (F3) discussed how it felt like to live with the model minority stereotype as someone whose background was not valued in the eyes of the society. She believed that her struggle searching for a job would be ongoing and that at the same time she would have to deal with the Asian stereotype all the way through it:

   I kind of wish I wasn’t Korean, maybe if I was something different, I would have a better job now ... I feel like I have to put in a lot more effort than somebody who was born and speaking the language get it so easily. That’s my life challenge and then we have this pressure of the Asian stereotype that wants us to be the model minority and they want us to be perfect in everything, but “I suck at math, I am terrible at science, no I am not gonna be a doctor,” so I’m not really valued but I have to keep up with the model minority stereotype and it’s just struggle I am gonna face more and more.
Lily (F4) reflected on her experience dealing with her parents’ expectations that she attend a specialized high school such as Stuyvesant or Bronx Science, which is a big dream for many Korean parents. She recollected,

My parents wanted me to go to specialized high school and it was kind of the Korean parents’ pride for their kid to go to Stuyvesant or Bronx Science or something like that. So I do remember my parents were pushing me to go take those tests. I guess that was also the time when I rebelled because when my parents told me to take the test I really didn’t want to. I do remember I was so stressed out.

Joyce (F5) shared her life as a senior working on her admissions portfolio for an art school. She remembered it was pretty tough:

My mom, she is the one that really raised me and I’ve seen her work really hard trying to get me to go to good school. I went to Pratt, it’s an art school. So, when I was a senior in high school twelfth grade, I was preparing my portfolio for college … It was very hard discipline; that’s the hardest I worked in my life I think ever.

Joseph (M2) did not like that Korean mothers always compare their children with other children. He believed that it was not right because every child has different gifts and interests, and the whole idea of comparison would make the child feel bad. He remembered when his parents forced him to be a doctor which he hated so much and how stressful it was:

Korean mothers have this whole comparison of children, have comparison of families, what is right, what is wrong, what kind of life. So, there was a lot of academic pressures especially … What if the person doesn’t wanna go to Stuyvesant and wanna pursue more of engineering field … I guess parents doesn’t wanna support their children but more like to guide them which my mom and my dad always pushed me to be a doctor and I hated doctor because I hate needles and I hate the whole hospital scene.

Jeremiah (M5) discussed his high school years when he was doing well, but his parents pushed him more, and he had to work even harder to go to an Ivy League school.

My mom would always say, “why aren’t you trying as hard?” meaning like studying a lot harder when I was already studying a lot … When I became senior year … my grades were phenomenal, my dream college that I wanted to go to for a long time was Cornell University, and then once it came to applying for early action for Cornell, my parents supported me … I applied for Cornell and I got accepted to Cornell, so both my parents were very happy about it being, they were like “oh my child is finally going to an Ivy League,” which is the American dream I guess for Koreans especially.
2. **American Stereotypes of Asians.** Asian stereotype codes were analyzed in terms of two themes that stood out: (1) perfect language use episodes in the United States or in other non-Asian countries and (2) thoughts on the practice of typical Asian values in the United States. Multiple youth reported that they had experienced these stereotypes toward Asians in Western countries. For example, Alice (F1) described her travel experiences where she felt different emotions while meeting different groups of people from all over the world. She felt annoyed by the fact that they thought that Asians did not speak English. She also perceived that people from non-Asian countries did not seem to know how to interact with Asians.

I just really like travelling. It’s funny because when you crash into people, they automatically assume that I can’t speak English because I am an Asian. They think I am straight from whatever Asian countries … So, that would annoy me very much.

Alice (F1) continued:

While travelling, I also feel weird because I like some people approaching as we are Asian. I like it but it is just so weird. They made us feel as we are really different. To me, I have been exposed to so many different people, so it doesn’t faze me at all. You can tell them feel uncomfortable. They don’t really know how to approach us, I just find that so funny like amusing because after all, we are all humans at the same level. We felt as if they felt uncomfortable around us sometimes.

She added she had been offended when people were shocked at her perfect English.

I get really annoyed and people are shocked at how perfect my English is, they are stunned and they are like “were you born in the States?” I’m like, “yes, I was born and raised in New York.” I’m just like, “you must live in a cave if you are shocked by things like this.”

Cindy (F3) talked about her experience with a professor during college. She felt uncomfortable when her college professor made a comment on her writing such that her essay was very well-written for someone who was from an Asian country.

I remember during my undergrad, I wrote an essay for class and the professor actually wrote, “wow, you speak really well of course someone of your background.” That was what he said, and it’s like I told him like where I grew up, “so what did you mean?” “Well, people don’t really have a good sense of, people don’t have good writing skills.” “What do you mean my people? I grew up here, I am an American.” I think that’s when he knew that he crossed the line.
Jason (M1) discussed that people think in general that Asians do not speak English and some people take advantage of this lack of English skills among Asians.

Some people take advantage of Asian people because we don’t speak English that well. But if you speak well and you are well-spoken, properly express your feelings and thoughts, then they don’t think, they don’t ignore you, they take you seriously because they know you are educated person … I think that type, “oh my goodness this person speaks English so well.” It only happens with Asians. I don’t see somebody going up to other races and say that … It’s only really Asians.

Joyce (F5) discussed on her thoughts on some of the Asian values when they are practiced in the U.S. She believed that a lot of Asian, Korean values in general may represent good morals and ethics, however, those values seem unfitting if we were to succeed in the U.S. Here she commented,

I feel like we were taught to behave in a certain way, be patient, obedient things like that, humble, which are all good things but I think in this society, if you wanna succeed, you need to be, you know, assertive and be really convincing and passionate and I mean, show your passion and, you know, be able to fluidly adapt to all social situations.

Joyce (F5) added that she used to be judged by the people around her as a passive and shy kid, but in fact, as a child she had to take more time to process her thinking into speech.

I had to be a listener and observer first, but people think “oh she is shy, Asian kids are all shy.” You know, there is that stereotype, and I think people mistake that we need time, I need a lot of time to process the situation in order to be able to speak, but people think that as “oh she is passive, she doesn’t have any ideas,” but it’s not, it’s you are just thinking and observing, and it takes time for you to think about how you are gonna say things.

3. Racism or bullying experiences. Two men and two women reported on racism and bullying experiences. Ethan (M4) experienced severe bullying in junior high school. The contexts in which racism or bullying occurred were at school, in the work place, at fast food restaurants, socializing places, and sometimes even while travelling around the world. Respondents expressed hurt when it happened to them. Alice (F1), for example, shared her experience of racism at the clubs where she could not go in until her White friends came out to
pick her up. She perceived it as a racial discrimination as the bouncer at the club put her aside and let all the White girls go in first.

Racial discrimination, for sure at the clubs, yeah … I was trying to go into this club, right? but my friends were already in there and I had to go in alone, right? and like the bouncer was like, are you alone?, I was like, “no, my friends are in there” and he was like, “who?,” and I was just like even if I name them, you are not gonna know, so then he was totally discriminating because he put me aside and then he let all these White girls go in right?, and then, I called my friends, “can you guys come out and get me?,” and my two friends came out, and he was like, “okay, go in.” So it’s like discrimination, you know. I can’t help but to think that oh you totally did that because I’m an Asian. That was last year. Isn’t it messed up?

Alice (F1) added how she felt when people in socializing places looked at her and her friend differently only because they were Asian girls. She felt it ignorant.

Now that I moved to the city, I go out more on the weekends like night life. Night life is funny in the city. Me and my friends go out a lot. We do drinking or go dancing whatever. Sometimes I feel weird because I feel like guys at the bars look at me really differently. … Even the security guards, sometimes I feel they come up because their friends want to talk to some Asian person anything like that. That is usually from really White guys who don’t have any exposure to Asian girls. I find it funny but it is also very ignorant.

Cindy (F3) experienced a hidden racism at her work place. After working so hard even to cover what her coworkers did not complete, she finally realized that she was a victim of racism.

The people at work took advantage of her being quiet instead of being vocal and just focusing on her work and tossed her their portion.

My work life, I guess, now I kind of sense that hidden racism in there … They assume that if they give more work to me, I will just do it without questioning that I wouldn’t speak up, and I was very quiet at work too at first because for me, it was just me at work, I’m not here to socialize … And then I had this woman, manager, and she tried to pull the same thing on me too. If other people slacked off, she would try to toss it on me and at first I did it because I really thought that they needed help, I would do it. The more like it’s like, they went to three hour lunches, and here I am stuck not being able to take lunch and that’s when I got like vocal … They probably thought I was just a quiet, little Asian girl who is very passive because that’s generally the idea, the stereotype that they have.

Jason (M1) reflected that there was so much racism during his junior high and high school years. It was just common at the schools. He did not understand it then, but now he
realizes that racism was worse among the children whose parents were not educated than among the children whose parents were well-educated. He commented,

My junior high school was just a lot of racism, they didn’t even know why. Now that I am an adult, I understand the reason why they were like that, especially in poor neighborhood is because a lot of their parents are less-educated, so the kids growing up learning from their parents, and their parents were very racists, so they told their children they only stick to their people, then these kids growing up learning them whereas more demographically educated group, there is a higher chance that your parents are less racists or they teach you that America is about the pot of cultures, so we have to get along with everyone.

Jason (M1) confronted many other cases of racism that involved his argument with White people who considered that the United States is the country of the White people which they use as a basis for their racism. For example:

I had some incidence of ignoring people who just look at me at certain situation, and they were like, “hey do you speak English?” in a very condescending way and then, I speak perfect English then they feel stupid. When I kind of outspoken and they get angry, then they tell me, “go back to my country” so then I tell them, “I was born here in this country,” they say “no, you are not White.” I say “okay, well, you are not Native American, where are you from?” They are like, “I’m American, I’m just White” … they don’t know if they are Irish, they don’t know if they are German, they just think they are American. At least, I know I’m Korean, and I was born in the U.S. You shouldn’t tell me, “go back to my country” because this is not your country either. When I tell them that, they have nothing to say because they know they are not right.

Ethan (M4) was bullied in junior high school. He recalled his experiences how miserable he felt multiple times during the interview session. The bullying had an effect on his identity struggle as he reported that it was really tough. He relates the first time he was bullied:

I got bullied in the beginning of seventh grade. That was the first time actually I was getting bullied and I was wondering why that was happening to me, you know, why. It was only, it wasn’t that long, it wasn’t even a half of seventh grade, and it was only the first month. And I think it was because I was too nervous or too shy or the way I came off as, but I don’t think they knew, ‘oh he is like the same as us’ because I am an Asian because most of my class were, they were mostly Hispanic, so I was trying to relate to them, but it was really hard and it just got really tough.

4. Thoughts on American societal images of Koreans and Asians. Five out of the ten youth shared their thoughts on common images of Koreans and Asians living in the United States. Those images communicated that Koreans are uptight, close-minded, conservative,
stubborn, passive, and obedient. They also felt that Koreans stick with only Koreans and do not try to mingle with other groups, and that the Korean community is insular. One man talked about how Americans view the North Koreans and the South Koreans, and one woman discussed that Koreans are an unimportant minority. For example, Jason (M1) referred to his conversation with his Korean boss at work such that both South Koreans and North Koreans would look all the same to Americans as they simply look at the skin color.

My Korean boss said, “If you can imagine North Korea and South Korea, they decide to go to war in America, what do you think is happening?” He told me, “when the two countries go to a war, the White people here and the other races here, they are gonna just see you all as Korean, and they are going to just look at your skin and not trust you completely … people are still going to demean you because you are simply Korean on the skin.” I think I kind of understood that because how many incidence have happened so far, so that is kind of eye-opening too.

Cindy (F3) felt that Koreans were an unimportant minority when she was searching for jobs. She saw that speaking Korean was neither preferred nor valued because the second language most employers preferred was Spanish, Chinese, or Arabic. She felt that her qualities were devalued as Koreans are not an important minority in the eyes of Americans.

Here especially in New York City, you know people see being a minority as part of your advantage, you have an extra knowledge that many Americans may not have, but I am not an important minority, if you look at job searches, they look for people who speak Arabic, Spanish, or Chinese, so even though I have this unique quality, it’s not important in the eyes of society, maybe this is a baggage … It’s kind of that unimportant minority identity.

Alice (F1) and Cindy (F3) believed that Korean community stuck together. For example, Cindy (F3) stated that Koreans are stubborn, and the Korean community is insular.

Korean community is much clustered, so it’s like if one person says something, everybody knows the next day. They are very conservative and stubborn.

Alice (F1) stated similarly,

Korean people is like they try to get to know you by asking you if you know this other Korean person, so I feel like the Korean community is very tiny, I mean it’s large but it’s tiny at the same time. And chances are I will know that person which I don’t like. It’s like
you know them through someone through, it’s like six degrees of separation, and I just find it so funny how you can do that with Korean people, with the Korean community.

Alice (F1) also thought that Koreans were generic, close-minded, tense, and uptight. She said she would rather not be friends with them as they would make her feel boring. She added, Not that I think Korean people are boring, but they just seem very generic in their way of thinking and they are very close-minded, some kinds I talked to, they are very close-minded, I don’t know it was just like, even though we can relate on so many levels, at the same time, I feel like I would rather not befriend them. They are tense and anal all the time. They seem like uptight … I feel like I am generalizing all the Koreans, but most of the Korean people I meet, they are so simple. It just like boring to me.

Joyce (F5) commented that Koreans were passive, quiet, patient, and obedient because that is the way we were taught to behave in public.

I am aware of how Korean people are in social situations, we tend to be more in the back, self-spoken, like listeners … I feel like we were taught to behave in a certain way I think, be patient, obedient things like that.

Lily (F4) used to think that Koreans lived in only a few states such as New York or California, so she found it fascinating when she heard that Koreans or Asians live in other places.

I always think it’s weird when Korean people live in other states because I am only familiar with Korean people living in I guess L.A. or here. There are so many Korean people, but then besides those states, when I hear somebody say that they grew up in like Iowa, I’m like it’s so fascinating that there’s Asian people living in those kind of really random states.

Alice (F1) shared her thoughts on Asians in general. She believed that most Asians act awkward when they are with non-Asian people such as a Black person or a White person because they do not know how to mingle with groups outside their own race and ethnicity.

Most Asian people I meet, because they are so, you know, in their own cliques ethnic-wise and like racially, I feel like when they do interact with someone who’s like, let’s say White or Black, they are just so awkward around them … I feel like a lot of like Asian people are like feel inferior to like White people, you know what I mean? We are like a minority.

5. Racism among Koreans. Several youth reported that they had had conflicts with their parents due to the parents’ racism. They reported that their parents were close-minded about race.
The youth attributed racism in their parents’ generation to a lack of exposure to different races while their parents were growing up. An explanation was that Koreans were a single ethnic group for over five thousand years, which may have encouraged racial exclusivism toward other races. Half of the youth shared related experiences. For example, Isabella (F2) described an argument with her mother about interracial marriage:

My parents, my mom she would always ask me about boyfriend like getting married whatever and she would sometimes make comments like no Black or Indians ... That really offended me and so I asked my mom, “Why can’t I date or marry a Black person?” But she kept just dodging it and saying, “I am just not comfortable with them.” Honestly I think it’s just a different upbringing, my parents were born and raised in South Korea where there is essentially no Black people whereas I was exposed to them from a very early age, so I can’t hold that against her, but it just saddens me that they do have that close-mindedness about race.

Cindy (F3) experienced racism while she was visiting South Korea. She said,

You know 이태원, right? There was a lot of foreigners, and I hear a lot of racist things they were talking about to people who are not Caucasian pretty much. You know especially with like Chinese, Japanese or even Blacks, and it’s like, holy shit, like these are my people, I can’t be associate with them because it’s terrible.

Jason (M1) reported on his experiences of racism in junior high school. The children stuck with their group of people only, or they would have been bullied. He felt that the Koreans were the worst group with racism as they hung out with only Koreans.

In Junior high, there would be a lot of fights among the groups. And the people who were bullied were usually people who did not stick with their groups. So if you are Korean, and you hung out with Chinese people, Black people, or Spanish people, then the group of Koreans, they would bully you or they just talk bad about you, they think you are disgrace to their race … I actually did not hang around Korean people other than the people whom I really cared about … Also I didn’t like the Korean groups much because they were the worst with racism.

Joseph (M2) talked about his mother’s racism, which he considered a result of her upbringing in Korea.

My mom, she is a racist, she hates African Americans, she hates lazy Spanish people. You know there is a lot of stereotypes and a lot of words need to be really shattered. But

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27 E-Tai-Won is a district in central Seoul.
you can’t really, my parents’ generation, we can’t really bring it on that, because that’s
the way they grew up.

David (M3) reported that he himself used to be a racist in high school. He had a lot of
pride in being a Korean American, and that caused him to be judgmental of other people.

What I said about my high school, I think it was about my pride, and my pride was my
biggest challenge, because it was really bad and I tended to judge a lot, so if I saw the
people that was with the wrong crowd, I was like, “oh you are one of those.” I tended to
judge and I was very rude to them including my racism problem … It was really bad. So
in high school, I was challenged by it a lot.

6. Racial and ethnic labeling and epithet-related experiences. Five of the youth
reported that they had been addressed with condescending racial or ethnic labels. Words most
frequently used included: white-washed, Twinkie, fob (fresh off the boat), yellow, so
Americanized, super-Americanized, Korean-washed, so Koreanized. These words were often
associated with the experience of prejudices and racism. Ethan (M4) reported that he had been
called yellow when he was bullied in junior high school. Jason (M1) commented that such slang
as fobby was a racist term used to point toward people who had just immigrated and had not
adapted to U.S. culture yet.

You know there are Asians that look Americanized, then there are Asians that look really
just fobby, it means fresh off boat, that’s what it stands for, very racist term.

Alice (F1) discussed White friends who had commented that she was the most White-
washed Asian they knew. Being young, she did not understand what that meant, but now she
wondered if they meant compliment her:

When I was younger, I would always get comments from my White friends, they would
always say, “Alice, you are the most White-washed Asian I know.” Yeah, they were
always like, “you are like a twinkie.” Twinkie is kind of pastry, inside is white cream and
outside is yellow. Because I was so young, I just didn’t even think twice about it, and I
was just like hahaha, yeah whatever, but then now that I am older and I’m thinking about
the stuff, Did they think as a compliment to me when they were saying I am White-
washed? … What is even acting White? I really don’t know what that means.
Two women (F1 and F3) reported that they were annoyed when people asked them, “Are you Chinese?” because of the condescending tone of their voice. Alice (F1) complained:

I would get these annoying comments like, “so, are you Chinese?” but in that condescending tone and times like that, that would take me off and I’m like, “okay, yeah I’m not Chinese but aside from that, if I were, what’s the issue there too?” So times like that, that’s annoying, I get really annoyed.

Cindy (F3) reported similarly being offended when asked if she were Chinese:

Around when I got into junior high school … I started to be defensive, especially when people ask me, “hey, are you Chinese?” They just automatically assume and then I will get very defensive, and I come off very aggressive with my answers.

7. Pride in being Korean Americans. Two men (M2 and M3) reported that they had pride in being Korean Americans. None of the women reported pride in being Korean Americans. For example, Joseph (M2) believed that Korean and Italians had similar pride issues.

So, Italians and Koreans, I feel like we have a very similar bond too. We have this pride problem, we have this sense of hardship, we get to earn it, it’s kind of thing.

David (M3) reported pride in being a Korean American several times during the interview. He felt pride in his Korean heritage and the respect that Koreans have for their country.

That’s when I think I kind of realized that though I am an American-born citizen, I still consider myself Korean as well because I kind of feel like Koreans have this national pride for their country, and I myself have that so.

David (M3) added,

In high school, like freshman year and sophomore year, I had a really bad pride that I was better than everyone … Because knowing that I was the only like one or two Koreans at the school, I just thought, “I am better than you” because like “I am Korean.” That’s kind of how I thought.

I. A Brief Summary of the Findings from the Life Story Analysis

The analysis of the life stories of the Korean young adults produced useful information showing how the different experiences of the youth in different social and cultural contexts were linked to identity development. The study findings from the analysis under each coding category supported this idea. First, when the Korean youth’s life stories were looked into through the
themes of agency and communion, they showed a greater tendency toward the agency-oriented, American life style with self-mastery as the most outstanding theme. Second, the two types of discourses in the Korean youth’s narratives showed that they differed in articulating their Korean American identity, depending on the context. Third, the youth’s neighborhood while growing up influenced mobility and intercultural and intracultural contact, which affected their Korean American identity. Also, each youth went through different types of identity struggle while growing up. Each differed in cultural adaptation. Fourth, the youth went through value conflicts with their parents on a variety of issues and expressed different thoughts on Korean parenting. Yet, the majority of the youth reported that they felt responsibility for parent and family support. Fifth, friends, school, and Korean church networks influenced a considerable portion of their life experiences, which contributed to the youth’s practice of Korean identity. Sixth, ethnic behaviors and practices seemed important in terms of practicing Korean-ness or Korean identity. Seventh, their life stories showed that they had gone through many changes in their perception of identity. Lastly, several youth experienced prejudices and discrimination in multiple contexts such as school, work, socializing places, and even while travelling. They felt that those experiences influenced their identity perception. In the following section, I will present the Korean youth’s MEIM-R results.

**Part II: Ethnic Identity Assessment Using the MEIM-R**

The Korean youth’s ethnic identity was assessed using the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R)* (Phinney & Ong, 2007). The *MEIM-R* consists of six items that explain two components of ethnic identity: exploration and commitment. Three items fall under exploration and three items under commitment, as presented in Table 4.
Table 4.

*Item Structure of the MEIM-R* (Phinney & Ong, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploration items</th>
<th>Commitment items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its</td>
<td>2. I have a strong sense of belonging to my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>history, traditions, and customs.</td>
<td>own ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have often done things that will help me understand my ethnic background</td>
<td>3. I understand pretty well what my ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>better.</td>
<td>group membership means to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have often talked to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic</td>
<td>6. I feel a strong attachment towards my own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group.</td>
<td>ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. Participants’ *MEIM-R* Results

The Korean youth’s reports on the *MEIM-R* were analyzed to see how the respondents position themselves with respect to each item of the measure. The scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*); the higher the score, the greater the agreement on each item. The mean scores of the women, the men, and the total were calculated for each of the *MEIM-R* components and items. The total mean score was 4.1 for the total sample. The total mean scored 4.0 for the women and 4.2 for the men. Men reported slightly higher score than women, but the Student’s *t*-test proved that there was no significant difference (*t* (8) = -1, *p* > .05).

I conducted a Student’s *t*-test although the sample size was small. de Winter (2013) writes, “some methodologists have cautioned against using the *t*-test when the sample size is extremely small, whereas others have suggested that using the *t*-test is feasible in such a case … yet research with an extremely small sample size (*N* ≤ 5), the *t*-test can be applied, as long as the effect size is expected to be large,” (p. 8).

The mean score for three exploration items was 4.1 for both the women and men. The mean score for three commitment items was 3.9 for the women and 4.2 for the men. The mean score of the sample for both exploration and commitment items was equally 4.1. Thus, the
Korean youth’s reports on the MEIM-R showed that the Korean men reported slightly higher score than the Korean women in commitment items, but the Student’s t-test proved that there was no significant difference ($t(8) = -0.635$, $p > .05$). Table 5 shows the MEIM-R scores for the women and men and the total sample by items of exploration and commitment.

Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEIM-R Scores for the Women and Men and the Total Sample by Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have often done things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have often talked to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score for Exploration items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score for Commitment items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The numbers represent: *strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), strongly agree (5).*

As shown in Table 5, the majority of the Korean youth reported “agree” on the items of the MEIM-R measure. That is, they reported that they had made efforts in exploring their Korean identity and also have made a commitment. Except for Cindy (F3), the rest of the Korean youth embraced their Korean identity. Cindy’s (F3) mean score was 3.3 for exploration items and 2.7
for commitment items. Thus, she scored lower than the majority of the Korean youth, which indicates she did not explore her Korean identity nor accept it as much as the other youth.

**B. Life Story Analysis and MEIM-R**

The life stories of the Korean youth and their report on the MEIM-R showed consistency. That is, the youth who perceived themselves more Korean in their interviews scored higher for both exploration and commitment items on the MEIM-R than the rest of the youth. In contrast, the youth who identified themselves more as an American in their life stories scored lower than their peers especially for commitment items. For example, Alice (F1) reported in her life story that she was thoroughly Americanized, and she scored 3.3 for both exploration and commitment items on the measure. Jeremiah (M5) described that he was raised as a whitewashed Korean American in his interviews and he marked 3.7 for commitment items. Yet, he scored 4.0 for exploration items on the MEIM-R. Isabella (F2) and Jason (M1) who scored highest with 4.7 for the exploration items on the measure reported in their interviews that they had made much effort to learn about their Korean heritage. Lily (F4) was the one who scored 5.0 for both exploration and commitment and she shared multiple life episodes that represented her Korean-ness. That is, she strongly agreed with the items on the measure, which indicated her strong commitment to Korean identity. David (M3) was the one who reported having a pride in being a Korean in his interviews, and he scored 4.7 for the commitment items, which was the highest score among men. Likewise, the qualitative interview data of the Korean youth was congruent with their reports on the quantitative identity measure, the MEIM-R. In the following chapter, I will discuss the implications of the study findings and some suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The goal of this study is to describe the identity of a sample of Korean youth through their individual life stories. I interviewed ten Korean young adults in New York City to achieve this goal. Their life stories generated rich information on how they perceive themselves in the social and cultural context of the United States. The ten youth reflected on their life experiences, and they articulated views of themselves. Through their own voices, the Korean youth discussed how their perception of identity has changed over time as shown in their American life stories.

This chapter discusses the implications of the study in light of the four research questions presented in earlier sections. This chapter consists of three sections. The first section considers my four research questions in accordance with the study findings. A second section summarizes the results presented in Chapter 4 and interprets the life stories of the Korean youth using the eight different coding categories for identity. The final section presents study limitations and suggestions for future research on Korean American identity.

A. Answering the Research Questions

This study investigated Korean American youth in New York City and the close connection of their identity development to the social cultural context. The Korean youth’s life stories confirmed the importance of social and cultural context in identity formation (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; Coté & Levine, 2002; Erikson, 1968; Goossens & Phinney, 1996; Hammack, 2008). The identity of the Korean youth was in the process of being constructed through “a person-in-context” (Adams & Marshall, 1996, p.429). The Korean youth living in New York City, on a daily basis, were situated in multiple different contexts that caused them to think about who they were as the descendants of Korean immigrant parents.
The identity of the Korean youth was developing at the intersection of being Koreans by ethnicity, Asians by race, and Americans by the upbringing (Kibria, 1997; Lee, 2002a). Yet, the youth who did not have the U.S. citizenship identified themselves as more Korean and Asian than American (Jung & Lee, 2004). The majority of the youth were born and raised in the United States, thus they considered the U.S. as their homeland; however, they were still Koreans speaking Korean at home and influenced by Korean values (Park, 2007). In addition, they were merely Asians in terms of their skin color in the eyes of the majority of Americans. The youth’s racial labelling seemed to play a crucial role in the process of identity construction (Kibria, 1997). They identified as Koreans, Asians, and Americans, categories thoroughly mixed in their life stories confirming that identity is multidimensional (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, 2014).

1. **What do individual life stories of the Korean youth tell us?** This study looked closely at how the Korean youth’s life stories took place while living in America’s multicultural context. Research has shown that life stories emerge in adolescence and become coherent and meaningful in young adulthood into late adulthood (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1985; McLean, 2005; McLean & Pratt, 2006). The life story narratives of the Korean American youth confirmed this idea. Not surprisingly, their stories differed in terms of length. How participants think back on their stories had to do in part with the age of the youth. Younger youth had less to tell than the older youth. Youth in their late teens had only begun to write their life stories (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1985) whereas the older youth in late twenties have already accumulated considerable narrative depth.

The life stories produced data rich enough to depict who they were. McAdams’ (1985, 1987, 1990) life story model of identity worked well in conjunction with narrative approaches to identity (Bamberg, 1997; Bruner, 1986; Fivush, 1991; Gjerde, 2004; Gregg, 2007; Hammack,
The study findings reaffirmed that the life stories of the youth represented how their identities evolved over time while going through different life experiences in different sociocultural contexts (Bamberg, 1997; Bruner, 1990; Fivush, 1991; Jung & Lee, 2004; Thorne & Nam, 2007). Taken together, the findings from the life story analysis demonstrated that the youth showed both commonalities and differences in their life experiences. Indeed, the youth’s life experiences were closely connected to each individual’s developing context, which, in turn, collectively explained how they came to be the persons who they are (Adams & Marshall, 1996).

### 2. How do perceptions of ethnic identity relate to life stories?

The ethnic identity perception of the Korean youth was clearly mirrored in their life stories. Identity is multidimensional, and an individual possesses “many ME’s: multiple identities” (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, 2014, p. 151). Ethnic identity—as a social identity—is one identity among multiple identities. As Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze (2014) write, “social identity is an identity that you share with others-special others, those in a group that you belong to and care about” (p. 149). In that sense, these scholars call social identity as “reference group identity” (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, 2014, p. 149). The study findings confirmed that the Korean youth’s life stories were full of reflections on ethnic identity as Koreans and that the Korean youth referred to themselves as belonging to Koreans as a group. More important, their perception of being Koreans, for the most part, occurred when they encountered the majority of Americans’ stereotypical thinking toward Asians in general or Koreans in particular. Confronting racism or experiencing bullying (Park et al., 2013; Shin et al., 2011) seemed to enhance the youth’s awareness of Korean or Asian identity (Kibria, 1997). Likewise, the ethnic identity of the Korean youth was being socially
constructed in accordance with the way Americans see them and how the Korean youth perceive or react to the way Americans see them as Korean immigrants.

3. The meanings of “being a Korean” or “Korean-ness” in everyday discourses. The life story narratives showed how the youth interpreted the meanings of being Koreans in their daily lives and in conversations with other Koreans. They believed that their Korean-ness or Korean heritage is constant and unnegotiable no matter what they want or how they try to as long as their blood is Korean (Kang & Lo, 2004). The majority of the Korean youth thought that they had better accept their Korean descent and live with that background while trying their best to make the most out of it. That is, in an attempt to embrace their both Korean and American sides, the youth thought that they should speak Korean better (Jo, 2001; Lee, 2002a; Park, 2007) and learn more about the Korean culture and history (Jung & Lee, 2004). For this reason, most of the youth made efforts to learn Korean language, culture, and history. Thus, the Korean youth tried to understand a lot of uniquely Korean things in daily lives beyond learning Korean language (Jo, 2001; Lee, 2002a; Park, 2007), manners, values, and cultural customs because they thought that these uniquely Korean things are what makes them Koreans (Jung & Lee, 2004).

4. The use of societal images of Koreans when describing life stories of Koreans. Several Korean youth noted that societal images of Koreans in the United States were used to describe the lives of their Korean friends and acquaintances. The images of Koreans—according to their perceptions—were such that Koreans were conservative, boring, patient, and obedient, Koreans associate with only Koreans, and Koreans are an unimportant minority. The youth considered that these images of Koreans would be a big obstacle to succeed as long as they live in the United States (Lew, 2006). They perceived that the images of Koreans were created as they lived by Korean patriarchal and collectivistic values (Jang et al., 2009), which are almost
the opposite of U.S. values (Jones et al., 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). In this way, the youth thought that the life stories of other Koreans demonstrated how hard they tried to absorb and practice Korean values. Those efforts, in turn, would continue to create images of Koreans in the United States that will be used in understanding and describing other Korean life stories.

B. Interpreting Korean Youth Life Stories through the Lens of Korean Culture

The life stories of the Korean youth revealed meanings and implications in how the youth perceive their identities. I will discuss these implications as both an insider and an outsider of the youth’s social cultural context.

1. Agency-oriented or communion-oriented life styles. The Korean youth life stories revealed a tendency toward agency-oriented, American life styles, rather than toward communion themes. Interestingly, the communion themes were not as common as the agency themes. This is probably because Korean collectivistic culture (Jang et al., 2009) is opposite individualistic U.S. mainstream culture (Jones et al., 2014; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). This sample of Korean youth did not adhere to the life styles of Koreans in Korea although they were the children of Korean immigrant parents (Palmer, 2007). The youth in this sample, with the exception of Cindy (F3), it was not that they did not realize or accept their Korean heritage. Rather, because they were born or spent most of their lifetime in the United States they felt inclined to follow the American way of living (Palmer, 2007). They accepted and followed the American value system, which promotes individuality and autonomy. This finding corresponds with what McAdams (2002) writes,

The necessary focus on the self … especially among contemporary citizens of Western societies, imbued with an ethic of individualism … The attainment of autonomy in human development is a very common theme among Westerners (p.3).
Among the four agency themes, *self-mastery* was most prominent, followed by *empowerment*. That is, the Korean youth often reported their life experiences as a way in which they acquired knowledge about themselves and aspired to new life goals and objectives. Their enhanced knowledge of themselves went beyond their ethnic identity. In other words, the youth’s ethnic identification was less important than their awareness of who they were as human individuals (Adams & Marshall, 1996). Several episodes of self-mastery were closely connected with Christian religious experiences and new visions of life (Chong, 1998).

The second most important theme was empowerment. Eight of the youth were from the same Korean church, and as might be expected they expressed common thoughts on God and the leaders of their church youth group (Chong, 1998). They felt empowered by their parents, mentors from college, or closest friends from church or work. The death of parents were important life experiences that encouraged them to think about what life is and how they should live.

The most interesting finding was that the communion themes were not as common as the agency themes. Yet, they considered the theme of *love/friendship* important in their lives. The majority of respondents connected with this theme pointing out that their closest friends had a considerable effect on their lives and their perception of identity (Jung & Lee, 2004). The theme of *caring/help* was revealed, for example, by helping parents in financial difficulty, providing assistance to friends, or teaching someone English. Two men in their late twenties reported episodes of *caring/help* that revealed gender expectations in Korean culture, i.e., women are expressive whereas men are instrumental (Spence & Helmreich, 1980). Yet, this finding may have been confounded with age considering that the women participants were relatively younger, most of them in their early twenties. The youth felt a great sense of *unity/togetherness* when it...
came to three different cases. That is, they felt those feelings of unity/togetherness when they met Korean friends for the first time, which brought them a sense of belonging to the Korean community either at school or at church, and when they made many friends from diverse backgrounds and began to realize that race did not matter. In this sense, the theme of unity/togetherness was crucially related to their identity perception.

2. Two discourses of identity. The life stories revealed that participants reported the “discourse of dispositions” more frequently than the “discourse of agency” according to Kang and Lo (2004)’s two types of “discursive positioning” (p. 95). In the Korean youth’s life stories, the frequency of the use of verbs of volition was higher than that of the use of verbs of observable action. This finding implies that the Korean youth considered identity as something inherent and related to their thoughts or feelings rather than as something changeable, depending on the person’s free will and actions to practice it (Kang & Lo, 2004). The most frequently reported verbs of volition in the Korean youth’s identity discourses were feel, feel like, think, and guess. Thus, the youth reported lots of thoughts and feelings when it comes to their identity perception.

The discourse of agency—observable actions—was relatively rare. Some youth only talked about speaking Korean and watching Korean TV shows occasionally. Jeremiah (M5) was the one who reported the discourse of agency in multiple sentences, using the action verbs such as learn, immerse, overstep, and explore. He reported on his ethnic behaviors and practices using those verbs. Four youth combined the two identity discourses. That is, the youth used the two identity discourses in conjunction with one another to better express their identity as either a Korean or an American or both. The discourse of dispositions represents our thinking and feeling about our identity, whereas the discourse of agency describes our acting (Kang & Lo, 2004). It
seems that the two identity discourses are connected with one another and make our identity discourses richer.

3. Neighborhood and cultural adaptation. The neighborhood that the youth was brought up in had a significant effect on identity formation. There was a manifest difference between those who were raised in Korean communities and those who were raised in predominantly White neighborhoods. For example, Alice (F1) and Jeremiah (M5) grew up in White neighborhood, which they described as being culturally Americanized. They even categorized themselves as Whitewashed, i.e., acting White (Lew, 2006), Korean Americans. On the other hand, the majority of the remaining interviewees were brought up in Flushing, Queens in the Korean community. In Flushing they had lots of intracultural contact. These youth perceived themselves as primarily Korean. The youth’s intracultural or intercultural contact proved to be an important factor in youth identity that cannot be ignored. In light of these findings, exposure to different racial groups early in life was found to produce different identity outcomes.

4. Family relations and experiences. In general, the lives of Koreans are centered on and influenced by family relations and experiences (Yang & Rettig, 2003). Family, alongside a strong emphasis on education (Cho et al., 2003; Jang et al., 2009), is central to Korean culture (Jung & Lee, 2004; Park, 2007). Most of the Korean youth connected with this theme in their interviews, primarily focusing on their relationship with parents (Kim, 2008; Kim & Park, 2011; Yang & Rettig, 2003). This seemed to be due to the fact that the five out of the ten youth were the only child in their family. The remaining five had a sibling, but they had little to say about their sibling relationships.
The youth expressed feelings of gratitude that their parents had made sacrifices to give them better lives. Parents even took up blue collar jobs for their children’s sake. Yet they perceived that their parents’ sacrifices were not necessarily good because the children would be burdened with paying them back. Korean culture stresses that parents do everything they can do to raise the children better, and then later in life the grown-up children provide for the parents when they get old (Yang & Rettig, 2003). Common across all participants’ life stories was the feeling of burden when it comes to family support. Moreover, a few youth thought that Korean parents were strict and temperamental with anger issues (Kim, 2008; Rohner & Pettengill, 1985). They thought parents were not emotionally expressive enough—a trait common in Korean culture (Kim, 2008; Rohner & Pettengill, 1985)—to say explicitly that they loved their children.

Several youth were at odds with their parents due to conflicts between youth and parental values (Yang & Rettig, 2003). These conflicts occurred in such areas as choosing schools, interracial dating and marriage, gay marriage, proper attire, and even going out on weekends. The youth had conflicts with their parents in almost every area of life. They believed that their parents were close-minded and unduly influenced by Asian patriarchal values, which were opposite of their American values.

Along with value conflicts, most youth mentioned their parents’ language difficulties. Nineteen out of twenty parents were born and raised in South Korea but immigrated to the United States when they were adults, so they did not have good English skills. One parent—the father of Lily (F4)—came to the United States when he was young, so he was bilingual in English and Korean. Except for Lily (F4), the remaining nine youth reported difficulties communicating with parents. Yet, there was a subtle difference among the youth depending on their fluency in Korean. The better Korean skills they had, the less they reported communication
difficulty when speaking with parents. Otherwise, when the parent had basic English conversation skills, the youth perceived fewer problems communicating with their parents.

When the youth did communicate with parents, they created intergenerational narratives from their parents or grandparents’ life stories (Merrill & Fivush, 2016). The intergenerational narratives increased the youth’s interest in Korean culture and history and strengthened their Korean identity. For example, Jeremiah (M5) reflected on his experience listening to his parents’ stories about their early life in Korea when, in the 1950s after the Korean War, it was a very poor country. His parents’ life stories encouraged him to study Korean culture and history. As a result, he started to understand that he was not just an American but a Korean.

Relationships with grandparents, especially grandmothers, played a role in the youth’s identity. Four youth reported that they were raised by grandmothers when they were young children since their parents had to work, which is pretty common in Korean culture. Two women—Cindy (F3) and Lily (F4)—reflected on the effect of grandparents on their lives. Yet, the outcome was quite different from each other. Cindy (F3) had been living with her grandparents for her entire life and she believed that her denial of Korean ancestry worsened because of value conflicts she had with her grandparents. What was even worse, the more her grandparents pushed her to accept her Korean heritage, the better she realized that the Korean thing was not for her. In contrast, Lily (F4) reported that living with her grandmother when she was young made her learn a lot about Korean culture and develop better Korean skills. Her experience reinforced her awareness of Korean identity.

5. Friends, school, and Korean church network. All the Korean youth shared their bicultural experiences with other Korean Americans (Jeong, 2004; Jung & Lee, 2004), which they perceived as an important part of their lives in the United States. The Korean friends played
a big role in their perception of Korean identity. Isabella (F2), David (M3), and Ethan (M4) embraced their Korean heritage when they met Korean friends for the first time. Among these youth, David (M3) and Ethan (M4) met their Korean friends at the Korean church. Besides them, the majority of the youth had close Korean friends from church (Chong, 1998; Jeong, 2004). The youth’s friendship experiences, for the most part, occurred at the Korean church they were attending.

Other venues at which the youth met Korean friends were schools and workplaces. Isabella (F2) and Joseph (M2) met close Korean friends at school. Jason (M1) developed a close relationship with his Korean boss at work. Through the boss, he learned about Korean culture and practiced Korean language skills. More important, he could learn what it meant to be a Korean in the United States through a conversation with his boss regarding North and South Korean issues. Lily (F4) was surrounded by many Koreans throughout her schools years, but she regretted having only Korean friends. She thought because of that she could not have friends with diverse backgrounds, which caused her miss different experiences.

The Korean youth considered sharing bicultural experiences with other Korean Americans especially important in life (Jeong, 2004; Jung & Lee, 2004). This was because Korean values are unique and only understandable by Koreans. For example, as Alice (F1) grew older, she better realized her parents’ sacrifice for her education, which is a value that only Koreans understand. So, she connected more with her Korean friends to share this type of life experiences, which her White friends would never understand. Cindy (F3) discussed the burden of family support to which only her Korean friends could relate.

The Korean youth’s multicultural circle of friends was an important part of their lives (Min & Kim, 2000). Seven of ten youth shared their stories about friends from different cultural
background. Jason (M1), Joseph (M2), and Jeremiah (M5) reported that outside church, their friends were from different backgrounds. Alice (F1) had many close White friends with whom she liked going out. Yet, from time to time, she was shocked when she heard her friends’ stories. For example, one of her White friends had a mom who treated her friend like a roommate. She felt astonished because the story would be unusual in Korean culture. It made Alice grateful for her Korean parents, encouraged her to think of herself as Korean, and highlighted her cultural differences.

Awareness of Korean identity was triggered by the youth’s multicultural friends (Min & Kim, 2000). For example, Isabella (F2) said that she came to appreciate her Korean heritage when she saw her Italian friend and family had such pride in being Italians. Cindy’s (F3) Latina friend helped her with her identity struggles by sharing similar identity problems. Ethan’s (M4) Mexican friend was helpful when he struggled with his identity during high school. These Korean youth recognized their Korean identity or Korean-ness through interactions with friends from different cultural backgrounds.

The Korean youth reported on diverse school experiences. Some experienced racism and bullying (Park et al., 2013; Shin et al., 2011). For example, Jason (M1) commented that he witnessed so much racism in his junior high and high schools. Students hung out with their own groups, and if anyone who did not stick with their group, they faced bullying. Ethan (M4) was bullied multiple times during his teenage years, including severely in seventh grade by the Hispanic children at his mostly Hispanic school. Being bullied introduced an identity struggle because he did not understand why it was happening to him and what it meant to be different from other children at school. David (M3) and Jeremiah (M5) talked about peer pressure during high school. For example, David (M3) had to branch off from his friends who took a wrong turn
in high school pressuring him to fight when he did not want to. Jeremiah (M5) felt pressured to do the drugs but he persisted in refusing and balancing the pressure with pressure from friends who wanted him to abstain.

Cindy (F3), who wanted to deny her Korean identity, had an unpleasant experience at school when she was made to wear Korean traditional clothing that she felt uncomfortable and disliked because it was against her own will. She reflected that it was the moment when she realized how much she hated being a Korean and wanted to hide it as best as she could. Cindy’s (F3) current denial of her Korean identity seems to be the outcome of her all negative life experiences.

Church experiences were common across narrative discourses except among two women who were not attending church. The lives of the Korean youth were centered on Korean church activities and influenced by the people there (Chong, 1998; Jeong, 2004; Min, 1992). They all appreciated that in times of difficulty support came from the church and its leaders. A few of the youth considered the Korean church integral to their Korean identity formation (Chong, 1998; Jeong, 2004; Min, 1992). For example, David (M3) and Ethan (M4) recognized their Korean identity when they met other Koreans at church. In Alice’s (F1) case, she came back to the Korean church when her father passed away and that was when she felt the church was playing an important role for her awareness of Korean identity.

6. Ethnic behaviors and practices. The Korean youth made efforts to learn Korean history, traditions, and customs (Jung & Lee, 2004) although they expended different amounts of time and effort. Efforts to learn the Korean language varied individually (Jo, 2001). Yet, all the youth reported having at least a basic level of Korean proficiency (Lee, 2002a). Growing up, each of the youth had to speak Korean at home because most of the parents were not English
speakers. Their parents were strict about speaking only Korean at home. The majority of the youth attended Korean schools on Saturdays, which is common in New York City’s Korean community.

Efforts to learn Korean history and language had to do with a strong awareness of Korean or American identity (Jo, 2001; Lee, 2002a). Participants reported that they felt bad for their lack of Korean skills after they had realized they were Koreans not just Americans. This finding supports Lee’s (2002a) findings, i.e., Korean youth acknowledge the role that learning the Korean language has on the awakening of their ethnic identity. Motivations to learn about Korean culture and speak the language varied by individual. For example, Alice (F1) was uninterested in Korean culture until her father passed away when she had to practice Korean customs. Korean funerals are one reflection of Korean culture. Her father’s death made her fully realize she was Korean. In contrast, Isabella (F2) participated in a six-month study abroad program in South Korea during college where learned about Korean culture. Nevertheless, she realized how Americanized she was after that experience. Cindy (F3) also became aware that her Korean language fluency had nothing to do with her being a Korean as long as she considered herself an American. Her mentality was never Korean even though she spoke Korean fluently.

Seven of the ten youth spoke in their interviews about the understanding and retention of Korean values, manners, and uniquely Korean things. They felt that Korean values had both good and bad aspects. For example, filial piety (Kim, 2007; Kim, Kim, & Kelly, 2006) is good because it teaches us to be respectful to older people. In Korean culture, it is natural to offer our seats to the old in public places such as when we get on the buses or trains. The same value, however, teaches us not to look straight into the eyes of older people when we talk to them, opposite to the American custom in which direct eye contact is a sign of respect. In a similar vein,
in Korean culture, greeting someone older requires several steps, whether on the phone or in person. Alice (F1) had trouble with this issue. When she was a young child, a manager at her mom’s workplace taught her how to speak in a proper Korean manner on the phone. She had to learn each step of greeting from politely introducing herself to asking to speak with her mom. She felt that Korean manners were onerous for someone born and raised in the United States. She also lamented that Korean culture was excessively family-oriented (Park, 2007; Yang & Rettig, 2003).

A few youth discussed only the negative aspects of Korean culture. Isabella (F2) commented that Korean culture was inclusive, by which she meant that in Korean culture, when people are in groups, everyone in the group should be doing the same thing (Yang & Rettig, 2003). For example, when the majority of the people are drinking, everyone should be drinking together, or at least they should be staying in the same place and enjoying time together. If not, the people in the group would think, “oh that person is not a part of us.” Isabella (F2) hated it when she was participating in the study abroad program in Korea. She found the prevalence of plastic surgery among Koreans indicated there was just one type of beauty in which all the Korean girls should look the same according to a singular definition of beauty.

Cindy (F3) experienced the same peer pressure to drink during her college years as Isabella (F2) did. When Cindy’s (F3) Korean roommates in college all went out drinking, they pushed her to drink. When she did not drink, they bullied her for refusing to conform to group behavior. Cindy (F3) recalled that at this moment she decided the “Korean thing is not for me, it’s too much.” It came right after her problem with the mother of her Korean ex-boyfriend. When Cindy (F3) met with the mother of her Korean ex-boyfriend, the mother asked Cindy
personal questions that Cindy considered inappropriate since she was born and raised in the U.S. following American values. Cindy (F3) was cynical about Korean culture.

Among all the things Cindy (F3) hated about Korean culture, at the top was Koreans’ concern about how other people would view them. It went extreme when she suffered from mental illness during her high school years. She did not know what it was at the time, but she was angry, although now she understands it was depression. Her family rejected advice to get professional help because they were concerned how other Koreans would view her. They thought that if Cindy visited a Korean doctor, then the next day every Korean in New York would know what happened and Koreans would label her crazy. In Korean culture, mental illness is a taboo subject especially among older generation (Atkinson & Gim, 1989), so they try to hide it if they have a family member who has mental illness. Yet, Cindy (F3) felt embarrassed because she identified as an American willing to seek professional help in treating psychological disorders (Atkinson & Gim, 1989). All things taken together, Cindy (F3) disliked being a Korean, and she was in denial of her Korean heritage.

Lily (F4) well understood a lot of things Korean such as favoritism toward the first child or first grandchild, but with some Korean values she disagreed (Yang & Rettig, 2003). For example, her parents did not get along well when she was growing up, so she witnessed her mom and dad fighting, including her dad hitting her mom. Lily used to think that if her dad mistreated her mom, she should have divorced him sooner. When her mom told Lily that she did not want her children to grow up without a father figure, she came to know what her mom was thinking. Even though Lily understood what her mom meant in light of Korean values, she did not think that her mom’s decision was right. Divorce is not as common in Korea as in the United States, although the divorce rate is increasing in Korea. Also, the majority of Koreans still think that
divorce is a bad thing for the children. Lily (F4), because she was born and raised in the U.S, thought that if she were her mom, she would have divorced her husband much sooner.

David (M3) and Jeremiah (M5) discussed the unique Korean values associated with their experiences in parent-child relationships. For example, in Korean culture, children are sometimes called 청개구리, when they do not listen to the parents and misbehave. In general, Korean parents strictly apply the standards of discipline (Kim, 2008; Rohner & Pettengill, 1985). Korean parents think that childhood discipline is important because the children will eventually represent the parents themselves. Koreans call it 가정교육. If someone is well-behaved, Koreans think that their parents raised them well with hard discipline. David (M3) remembered his childhood when he was called Cheong-Gae-Gu-Ri way due to the wrong things that he did. Some parents tell their children about the times when they were growing up such as several decades ago when Korea was a very poor country right after the Korean War. For example, Jeremiah (M5) often listened to his parents’ stories about growing up, which helped him understand his Korean background and relate to other Koreans better.

Three women talked about how Korea visits (Jung & Lee, 2004) made them more aware of their American lifestyle and American identity. For Isabella (F2), six months in Korea made her realize how Americanized she was when she could not conform to the Korean values and lifestyle. Cindy (F3) was upset when she did not get a sense of welcoming from her extended family in Korea and when her Korean friends gave her jealous looks. As a consequence, she decided not to return again. Lily (F4) considered her Korean heritage important, yet while visiting Korea, she realized that she looked different to Koreans in Korea and that native Koreans would see her as

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28 Cheong-Gae-Gu-Ri is a blue frog from a Korean traditional story. In the story, he did not listen to his parents and did exactly the opposite of what his parents had asked him to do while they were alive, but he regretted and cried a lot after the parents passed away.
29 Ga-Jeong-Gyo-Yuk means child discipline at home.
an American and different from themselves. She was interested in Korean culture and Korean
mass media, so she often watched Korean shows on internet (Jung & Lee, 2004), but she was
aware that her upbringing in the United States made her different from native Koreans in Korea.

7. Major turning points in Korean American identity development. The Korean
youth’s life stories showed that each changed in their perception of Korean American identity
over time with the exception of Cindy (F3). Most changes in identity perception occurred during
high school. Those changes were also associated with some important life experiences, i.e.,
turning points in life (McLean & Pratt, 2006). For example, Alice (F1) thought that her
perception of identity as an American was the result of her moving, in seventh grade, to a White
neighborhood. Isabella (F2) thought that she became aware of her Korean heritage when she
moved to New York and made several Korean friends. Lily (F4) believed that she accepted her
Korean identity on her own not by her parents pushing her in high school. David (M3) also
realized his Korean identity in high school when he began attending the Korean church. Ethan
(M4) was the one who had the biggest identity struggle in junior high school, but he finally
realized, in high school, that he was a Korean not an American. In a similar vein, Jeremiah (M5)
was made aware that he was Korean even if he thought he grew up as a whitewashed Korean
American during his high school years.

These findings reaffirm what Erikson (1968) discussed, i.e., adolescence seems to be the
time when most people experience many different types of identity issues and try to understand
who they were as a person. Two youth, Joseph (M2) and Joyce (F5), considered that their
identity changed when they went to church and had life changing religious experiences. Jason’s
(M1) realization of Korean identity occurred when he had a deep conversation with his Korean
boss in his early twenties.
Cindy (F3), Ethan (M4), and Jeremiah (M5) reported on their experiences of identity struggle. Only Cindy (F3) did not report changes in her perception of identity. Her identity struggle was still ongoing. She experienced much conflict during her childhood because she had many trips to Korea. When she went to Korea, the Koreans did not see her as a Korean, but when she came back to the United States, Americans did not see her as an American. She felt isolated. Even worse, she could not fit in with the Koreans in the U.S. (Palmer, 2007), and this finally gave her no choice but to deny her Korean background. Jeremiah (M5) struggled less than Cindy (F3) and Ethan (M4), but he also felt that there was a borderline separating being a Korean at home and being a Korean American at school, which caused conflict during his high school. Compared to the rest of the youth, these three had a much harder time in figuring out who they were.

The majority of the Korean youth felt pretty comfortable with identity issues (Min & Kim, 2000). Jason (M1) and David (M3) explicitly expressed positive feelings about their Korean American identity. Jason (M1) reported that he always felt comfortable with his identity. David (M3) said that his Korean American identity never bothered him. Multiple youth implied that they felt okay after they had embraced their Korean side (Min & Kim, 2000). In Cindy’s (F3) case, she expressed her negative feelings multiple times in her interview, which implied that her life has been tough ever since she perceived her Korean background as a big hurdle in her life.

8. *Prejudices and discrimination*. Interviewee experiences with prejudice and discrimination were linked to their identity development (Park et al., 2013; Shin et al., 2011). They reported an increased awareness of Asian and Korean identity when they faced prejudices and discrimination. The first stereotype they frequently encountered was that of the model minority (Lew, 2006). Seven out of the ten youth felt pressured to conform to the model minority
stereotype. In most Korean families, parents have high expectations for their children’s—both sons and daughters—education and professional development (Lew, 2004; Yang & Rettig, 2003). The sample of this study illustrated this aspiration for education in Korean culture: Nine out of the ten youth were either college graduates or attending colleges. They constantly worried about how other people would see them when they did not succeed in life assignments such as going to good schools or developing lucrative or prestigious career paths. Since education is a top priority in Korean families (Yang & Rettig, 2003), Korean children grow up with their parents telling them, “you should do well in school.” Participants were no different in this respect and frequently voiced the weight of responsibility for educational success.

Several participants commented on their experiences confronting stereotypes about Asians (Park et al., 2013; Shin et al., 2011). A common stereotype they had come across was related to their English skills. They felt bad when people were surprised that they spoke perfectly good English. Another stereotype they encountered was that Asians could not get along with other groups of people. That is, Asians socialize with only Asians. The youth perceived that other groups of people would feel uncomfortable around Asians not knowing what to do. In addition, women respondents thought Asian females were taught to be obedient, patient, and humble, typical Asian values but not those that conform to U.S. culture (Yang & Rettig, 2003). They felt that the Asian values do not foster success in the United States.

Four of the ten youth reported on experiences of bullying and racism. The men experienced racism and bullying at junior high and high schools. The two women reported confronting racism at work and socializing and in clubs or bars. Alice (F1) reported her experience of racism most often among the participants. She commented that even while travelling, racism was common. Quite interestingly, she viewed herself as a very Americanized
person, but those times she perceived racism toward Asians were the moments when she came to recognize her Asian heritage. The other woman perceived hidden racism at work and decided she would fight against the racism by being outspoken whenever needed. Otherwise, she felt, people would consider Asian women are quiet and passive and would do all the work assigned to them. She felt outraged about all the implicit racism at her workplace.

Half of the youth discussed their thoughts on societal images of Koreans in the U.S. (Jung & Lee, 2004). They thought that Koreans were boring, generic, insular, and awkward around other groups of people, which is why Koreans all live close to other Koreans only in big states such as New York, New Jersey or California. Some youth also felt that Koreans were an unimportant minority in U.S. society because when it comes to jobs being bilingual Korean-English has no value in the eyes of employers whereas other foreign languages such as Chinese, Spanish or Arabic were valued. In addition, in the eyes of Americans North Koreans and South Koreans were the same. Americans simply look at physical appearance such as skin color. In multiple youth’s cases, their thoughts on Koreans were the reason why they either wanted to be affiliated with the Korean community or reject it.

The Korean youth also reported about the racism among Koreans. For the most part, the racist attitudes were a problem of their parents’ generation. They felt that their parents were close-minded about race, which was a result of the different upbringing. That is, the youth were born and raised in the U.S. and was exposed to different racial groups from early in life with lots of interracial contact; their parents, however, were all born and raised in Korea which is claimed to be a single ethnic group country for over five thousand years with no interracial contact (Kim, Kim, & Kelly, 2006). The youth felt that Koreans were tainted with racism.
Several youth commented on racial and ethnic labels and epithet-related experiences. They had heard the condescending terms fobby, yellow, twinkie, and whitewashed. Alice (F1) commented that she had not thought about the meaning or implications of *whitewashed* when she was young, but as she grew older, she began to think about the intentions of her White friends who called her that. She realized that maybe they meant it as a compliment because they thought Whites were superior to Asians (Lew, 2006). Though she identified herself more as an American, she could not but feel bad as her awareness of her Korean background grew stronger. A few women felt offended when they were asked if they were Chinese. It is true that many Koreans are frequently asked if they are Chinese or Japanese. I myself have the same experience. This is because Asians may look all the same to the Westerners (Kibria, 1997) and many Americans do not know that there are more than twenty ethnic groups under the Asian category. So, even if there is no reason to be offended when asked if we are Chinese or Japanese, Koreans usually dislike being misidentified.

In summary, the Korean youth’s life stories represented who they were. The youth’s life stories were their identity. Each coding category revealed different aspects of identity. For example, the life story analysis confirmed that there was a greater tendency toward agency-oriented life styles. When their life stories were looked into by the categories of Korean patriarchal and familial values, the majority of the youth experienced those Korean values in family related life episodes. Participants understood the import of uniquely Korean things to their life stories, but ethnic behaviors and practices were less common than might be expected. In each coding category it was useful to investigate multiple different sides of the Korean youth’s life experiences and that the eight coding categories taken together explained the identity of the Korean youth.
C. Wrapping Up: Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The Korean youth, as an ethnic minority, have been underrepresented or marginalized in identity studies. The study investigated the identity of the ten Korean youth in New York City through their life stories. The findings showed that the identities of the Korean youth were mirrored in the individual life stories. The individual life story cannot be written separate from its social cultural context (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Coté, 1996; Coté & Levine, 2002; Erikson, 1968; Hammack, 2008). Thus, the analysis of the Korean youth’s life stories explained each Korean youth’s individual developmental context, which explained the youth’s identity. In this sense, to understand a person’s identity requires an understanding of the context in which his or her life story was written.

The study findings provided us with useful information for our understanding of the Korean youth’s lives in New York City. The stories of the Korean youth revealed that they were making constant efforts to create better lives by adapting better to U.S. culture. Baumeister and Muraven (1996) define identity as an individual’s adaptation to the sociocultural environment. The life stories of the Korean youth confirmed this idea—the Korean youth’s identity reflected the process of adaptation to the U.S. sociocultural context. In so doing, the Korean youth continued to construct a self-understanding of who they were within that environment while making a lot of interpersonal connections with different groups of people around them.

1. Limitations of the study. This study was the first study to look closely at the identity of the Korean youth in New York City by analyzing their life stories. The information gathered through the analysis of their life stories expanded our knowledge of the lives of New York City Korean youth and how closely the youth’s identities were linked to the developing context of the youth. Yet, this study has several limitations.
First, the Korean youth participants were a convenience sample and relatively homogeneous. Out of the ten youth, eight were recruited from the youth group of a Korean Presbyterian church in Queens, New York. The remaining two were separately recruited through an internet advertisement. The eight church attenders shared similar church experiences, which explains their similar religious identity. The church setting was an important context for the eight youth’s identity development (Chong, 1998; Jeong, 2004), which explained the uniqueness of the sample. They differed in other areas of life experiences. The other two youth were different from the eight church attenders and showed different life styles.

Second, this study was a qualitative study, and I collected all the data from the ten Korean youth through an in-depth interview with each youth. Thus, the sample size was small, and it cannot serve as representative of Korean youth in New York City. The goal of the study was to describe the identity of the ten Korean youth as reflected in their life stories. Therefore, the study results should not be generalized.

Third, the quantitative ethnic identity measure, the MEIM-R, was administered only to see whether the quantitative results provide useful information to our understanding of the youth’s identity in addition to their life stories. Therefore, the findings from the MEIM-R cannot be used in a way to predict or generalize the Korean youth’s ethnic identity. Again, the sample was too small to provide such information.

Transcripts varied in length. Besides the age of participant and their personality characteristics, gender was related to the length of interview and transcript. In other worlds, the younger youth with introverted personalities talked less and women talked more than men on average. It could have been due to me, a woman. This has been addressed with respect to cross-gender interviews (McKee & O’Brien, 1983; Song & Parker, 1995). There is a possibility that
the men would have talked more if they had been interviewed by a male interviewer. This issue should be considered when interpreting the result.

Last but not least, I listened to the narrative discourses of a sample of Korean youth to capture their identity drawing on the theoretical bases of life story theories. They were life stories of individuals constantly changing and evolving (McAdams, 2001). Some stories have greater significances than others, depending on many factors such as the time, place, and context of the stories spoken and told. Thus, no single life story is enough to understand a person’s identity (McAdams, 2001). We may have to listen to a person’s many different stories over an extended period of time across several different developmental stages. Further, since the stories have meanings for the individual for that specific time and sociocultural context (McAdams & McLean, 2013), the interpretation of the stories—as a way to understand the person’s identity—will have to be by someone who understand the context in that specific time.

The other limitation of the life story method concerns the nature of narrative. Some argue that narrative cannot be an object of scientific research as it is a work of art in nature (Brown, 2006; Mink, 1978). Those who do not support the use of narrative in psychological studies criticize that people’s stories may not exactly represent the reality of their lives. Instead, the stories may be used as a way to picturize who they want to be or to be discharged from their actual lives (Brown, 2006; Mink, 1978). Thus, the limitations of life story method will have to be considered in reading this dissertation and for future studies.

2. Suggestions for future research on Korean identity. The study demonstrated that the Korean youth’s identity was constructed while their life stories were being written. Thus, the identity of an individual can be well understood by studying the individual’s unique life

First, the Korean youth’s life stories revealed that the identity of the youth has changed over time in the face of important life events. The Korean youth had had a few critical points in life that caused them different perceptions of identity in different life times. Among the ten youth, one woman whose identity struggle was still ongoing said that if she could have the same conversation in ten years, her identity would have changed again. She was certain that she would present a different perspective on her identity when she grew older. So, taking longitudinal approaches to identity studies would provide much richer information to understand identity development. As Henry Murray wrote, “the history of the organism is the organism,” (Murray, 1938, p. 39). From this perspective, studying a person’s identity requires an understanding of the history of the individual.

Second, the study interviewed only Korean youth in New York City who either were born and raised in the U.S. or came to the U.S. when they were six or younger. In future studies, to recruit Koreans born and raised in different contexts and to compare their identity outcomes would provide us with an important piece of information for our investigation of the role of context when it comes to identity formation. For example, studying and comparing four different groups of Koreans would be interesting, i.e., native Koreans in Korea, Koreans who came to the U.S. when they were fully grown up, 1.5 generation Koreans (Koreans who were born in Korea but came to the U.S. when they were teenagers), and second generation Koreans (Koreans who were born and raised in the U.S.). To have these four groups of sample and to apply the life story model of identity would make the identity literature richer.

For a review of the terms, see Palmer (2007).
Third, as the findings revealed, there was a clear difference between the younger and older youth in the number of life stories and reflections on them. For example, the youth in their late teens to early twenties have just begun writing life stories whereas youth in their late twenties have written a considerable number of life stories. In addition, the older youth were more likely to have reflected more deeply on their life stories. Further, life stories emerge in adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1990; McLean, 2005). Including teenage life stories will show how the stories begin and continue to evolve over time. Comparing the life stories from different age groups of youth in future studies will provide us with much detailed information about the trajectories of identity development with age.

Fourth, the study used a qualitative methodology in collecting and analyzing the life story narrative data. The use of the quantitative measure was to add information and it was not a main focus of the study. Yet, the results from the MEIM-R assessment of the Korean youth’s ethnic identity—despite the small sample—paralleled the results from the life story analysis. For example, the Korean youth who marked high on the commitment items of the measure shared their life episodes that represented the commitment to embrace their Korean identity. Thus, combining the qualitative life story model with quantitative research techniques will improve our understanding of identity. In employing a mixed method, I recommend administering a quantitative identity measure after the qualitative interview in order to avoid any possible priming effect in narrative discourses.

Fifth, as Goossens and Phinney (1996) highlighted, to fully explore the multi-dimensional nature (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, 2014) of identity outcomes, identity studies should explain how the contextual influences are mediated through interpersonal processes. In the past, identity research was mostly comparative studies on different groups of people, but it is
time to move beyond the concept of race and ethnicity. Each individual’s identity may have a unique pathway as reflected in each person’s social, cultural, and historical contexts as being connected with diverse groups of people. In addition, as numerous identity scholars pointed out, each individual needs to combine both “interpersonal differentiation and integration” for their self-understanding of who he or she is because doing so is “critical for healthy human development” (Adams & Marshall, 1996, p. 431; Erikson, 1968; McLean, 2005; Papini, 1994).

Sixth, future research needs to disentangle the influences on identity of sociocultural variables such as race, ethnicity, culture, immigration, acculturation, social class, and other economic indicators. Quintana et al. (2006) recommend that researchers assess sociocultural processes directly and not by proxy as sociologists do when studying ethnic demographics as predictors of identity outcomes. This requires that that racial and ethnic consciousness and identity be assessed directly rather than merely inferring them from an individual’s group membership.

Seventh, studies on minority youth so far have captured overall developmental outcomes after immigration to the United States. For instance, Suarez-Orozco et al. have documented Chinese and Mexican immigrant students’ developmental trajectories in the U.S. through longitudinal, quantitative data analysis. They have specifically focused on these youth’s school and academic achievement or health outcomes (Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Yet, we do not know much about the children of immigrants (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) or the identity of these youth. Even worse, studies of immigrant youth and their identity have generated conflicting, inconsistent results that require further investigation (Schwartz, Cano, & Zamboanga, 2015). Associated factors included the time of immigration, years of U.S. residency, racial and ethnic background, immigrant
generation, socio-economic status variable, language fluency, gender, and so forth (Suarez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, & Marks, 2015). Yet, future studies need to explain how these variables work together to generate different identity outcomes in each ethnic minority youth through a detailed documentation.

Finally, individual and group differences within different Asian ethnic groups and the antecedents and underlying processes, i.e., “identity negotiations” (Palmer, 2007, p. 277) involved in variations in identity outcomes among these ethnic minority youth should be considered in future identity studies. Culture should necessarily be understood as a context in which identity develops (Hammack, 2008), but not a sole determinant. The identity of Korean and Asian American youth is a value-laden crucible that should be explored to better understand these youth and their life trajectories in their new land or in their land of birth.

3. Concluding thoughts. This study was inspired by McAdams’ theory that identity is the person’s life story (McAdams, 1985, 1987, 1990). Challenged by the idea, I wanted to listen to the life stories of a sample of Korean youth living in New York City to understand their Korean American identity. I hoped that this investigation would add a piece of information to the Korean American identity literature. I was interested in the identity of Korean Americans because I thought they would experience identity conflict living with Korean and U.S. value systems. They are Koreans at home, often with parents who lack proficient English skills. Seven of the ten youth were U.S.-born, with the remaining three arriving in the United States early in life. Thus, they were children of Korean immigrants but Americans living American life styles for most of their lives. Nonetheless, they understood and retained many traditional Korean values.

As my findings revealed, awareness of Korean heritage occurred in facing many different life experiences. Parents, family, friends, school, church, and the Korean community in New
York were all important contexts for the youth’s realization of their Korean-ness. Images of Koreans specifically and Asians in general influenced their awareness of Korean and Asian identity. The youth confronted racism, which along with American stereotypes and prejudices towards them raised their awareness of Korean and Asian identity. While a few youth perceived their Korean heritage would be hurdles to successful American lives, each realized that they had better embrace their Korean and American sides because their Korean heritage was undeniable.

Although living between Korean and American life may on occasion be tough, the majority of the Korean youth felt comfortable accepting both Korean- and American-ness. They reported having made efforts to choose career paths to enhance their and their families’ lives. One unique finding—explained by the characteristics of the sample—was that their Christian faith played a pivotal role in overcoming many life obstacles. The life stories of the Korean youth, indeed, showed who they were and how they have been living in the United States. Thus, the identity of the Korean youth developed as their life stories were being written.
Appendix A: The Korean Youth Life Story Interview Protocol

Introductory Comments

This is an interview about the story of your life. I want you to play the role of storyteller about your life to construct the story of your own past, present, and what you see as your own future. As a doctoral student researcher, I would like to hear how you make sense of your own life.

You do not need to tell me everything that has ever happened to you. A story is selective. You should concentrate on material in your own life that you believe to be important in some fundamental way -- information about yourself and your life which says something significant about you and how you have come to be who you are. Your story should tell how you are similar to other people as well as how you are unique. I am not trying to figure out what is wrong with you. Nor am I trying to help you figure out what is wrong with you. The interview should not be seen as a “therapy session.” This interview is for research purpose only, and its sole purpose is the collection of data concerning people’s life stories.

The interview is divided into a number of sections. The interview starts with general things and moves to the particular. Please do not feel compelled to provide a lot of detail in the first section in which I ask for this outline. The detail will come later. I will guide you through the interview so that we can finish it in good time. I think that you will enjoy the interview. Most people do.

Questions?

I. Life Chapters

I would like you to begin by thinking about your life as a story. All stories have characters, scenes, plots, and so forth. There are high points and low points in the story, good times and bad times, heroes and villains, and so on. Think about your life story as having at least a few different chapters. I would like you to describe for me each of the main chapters of your life story. I would suggest dividing your story into at least 2 or 3 chapters and at most about 7. If you can, give each chapter a name and describe briefly the overall contents in each chapter. As a storyteller, think of yourself as giving a plot summary for each chapter. I would like you to keep it relatively brief, say, within 20-25 minutes.

II. Critical Events

Now that you have given us an outline of the chapters in your story, I would like you to concentrate on a few key events that may stand out in bold print in the story. A key event should

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31 This is a slightly modified and shortened version of McAdams’ (1995) life story interview protocol.
be a specific happening, a critical incident, a significant episode in your past set in a particular time and space. It is helpful to think of such an event as constituting a specific moment in your life story which stands out for some reason.

I am going to ask you about 8 specific life events. For each event, describe in detail what happened, where you were, who was involved, what you did, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event. Also, try to convey what impact this key event has had in your life story and what this event says about who you are or were as a person. Please be specific here. Each of the 8 critical events in this section should be independent. I want 8 separate events.

Questions?

**Event #1: Peak experience**

A peak experience would be a high point in your life story. It would be a moment or episode in the story in which you experienced extremely positive emotions, like joy, excitement, great happiness, uplifting, or even deep inner peace. Today, the episode would stand out in your memory as one of the best, highest, most wonderful scenes or moments in your life story.

Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what you did, and what you were thinking and feeling, what impact this experience may have had upon you, and what this experience says about who you were or who you are.

**Event #2: Nadir experience**

A “nadir” is a low point. A nadir experience is the opposite of a peak experience. It is a low point in your life story. Thinking back over your life, try to remember a specific experience in which you felt extremely negative emotions, such as despair, disillusionment, terror, guilt, etc. You should consider this experience to represent one of the "low points" in your life story.

Even though this memory is unpleasant, I would still appreciate an attempt on your part to be as honest and detailed as you can be. Please remember to be specific.

**Event #3: Turning point**

Turning points can occur in many different spheres of a person's life -- in relationships with other people, in work and school, in outside interests, etc. I am especially interested in a turning point in your understanding of yourself. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point. If you feel that your life story contains no turning points, then describe a particular episode in your life that comes closer than any other to qualifying as a turning point.
Event #4: Earliest memory

Think back now to your childhood, as far back as you can go. Please choose a relatively clear memory from your earliest years and describe it in some detail. The memory need not seem especially significant in your life today.

The memory should be detailed enough to qualify as an "event." You should choose the earliest (childhood) memory for which you are able to identify what happened, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Give me the best guess of your age at the time of the event.

Event #5: Important childhood scene

Now describe another memory from childhood, from later childhood, that stands out in your mind as especially important or significant. It may be a positive or negative memory.

What happened? Who was involved? What did you do? What were you thinking and feeling? What impact has the event had on you? What does it say about who you are or who you were? Why is it important?

Event #6: Important adolescent scene

Describe a specific event from your teen-aged years that stands out as being especially important or significant.

Event #7: Important adult scene

Describe a specific event from your adult years (age 21 and beyond) that stands out as being especially important or significant.

Event #8: One other important scene

Describe one more event, from any point in your life that stands out in your memory as being especially important or significant.

III. Life Challenges

Looking back over the various chapters and scenes in your life story, please describe the single greatest challenge that you have faced in your life. How have you faced, handled, or dealt with this challenge? Have other people assisted you in dealing with this challenge? How has this challenge had an impact on your life story?
IV. Influences on the Life Story: Positive and Negative

Positive

Looking back over your life story, please identify the single person, group of persons, or organization/ institution that has or have had the greatest positive influence on your story. Please describe this person, group, or organization and the way in which he, she, it, or they have had a positive impact on your story.

Negative

Looking back over your life story, please identify the single person, group of persons, or organization/ institution that has or have had the greatest negative influence on your story. Please describe this person, group, or organization and the way in which he, she, it, or they have had a negative impact on your story.

V. Stories and the Life Story

I would like you now to think a little bit more about stories and how some particular stories might have influenced your own life story. I am interested in knowing what some of your favorite stories are and how they may have influenced how you think about your own life and your life story. I am going to ask you about three kinds of stories. In each case, try to identify a story you have heard in your life that fits the description, describe the story very briefly, and tell me if and how that story has had an effect on you.

Television, Movie, Performance: Stories Watched

Think back on TV shows you have seen, movies, or other forms of entertainment or stories from the media that you have experienced. Please identify one of your favorite stories from this domain -- for example, a favorite TV show or series (or Korean soap opera), a favorite movie, play, etc. In a couple of sentences, tell me what the story is about. Tell me why you like the story so much. And tell me if and how the story has had an impact on your life.

Books, Magazines: Stories Read

Now think back over things you have read -- stories in books, magazines, newspapers, and so on. Please identify one of your favorite stories from this domain. Again, tell me a little bit about the story, why you like it, and what impact, if any, it has had on your life.
Family Stories, Friends: Stories Heard

Growing up, many of us hear stories in our families or from our friends that stick with us, stories that we remember. Family stories include things parents tell their children about "the old days," their family heritage, family legends, and so on.

Children tell each other stories on the playground, in school, on the phone, and so on. Part of what makes life fun, even in adulthood, involves friends and family telling stories about themselves and about others.

Try to identify one story like this that you remember, one that has stayed with you. Again, tell me a little bit about the story, why you like it or why you remember it, and what impact, if any, it has had on your life.

VI. Alternative Futures for the Life Story

Now that you have told me a little bit about your past, I would like you to consider the future. I would like you to imagine two different futures for your life story.

Positive Future

First, please describe a positive future. That is, please describe what you would like to happen in the future for your life story, including what goals and dreams you might accomplish or realize in the future. Please try to be realistic in doing this. In other words, I would like you to give me a picture of what you would realistically like to see happen in the future chapters and scenes of your life story.

Negative Future

Now, please describe a negative future. That is, please describe a highly undesirable future for yourself, one that you fear could happen to you but that you hope does not happen. Again, try to be pretty realistic. In other words, I would like you to give me a picture of a negative future for your life story that could possibly happen but that you hope will not happen.

VII. Personal Ideology

Now I would like to ask a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and values and about questions of meaning and spirituality in your life. Please give some thought to each of these questions.

1. Consider for a moment the religious or spiritual dimensions of your life. Please describe in a nutshell your religious beliefs or the ways in which you approach life in a spiritual sense.
2. Please describe how your religious or spiritual life, values, or beliefs have changed over time.

3. How do you approach political and social issues? Do you have a particular political point of view? Are there particular issues or causes about which you feel strongly? Describe them.

4. What is the most important value in human living? Explain.

5. What else can you tell me that would help me understand your most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world, the spiritual dimensions of your life, or your philosophy of life?

VIII. Life Theme

Looking back over your entire life story as a story with chapters and scenes, extending into the past as well as the imagined future, can you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme of your life story? Explain.

IX. Other

What else should I know to understand your life story?
## Appendix B: Demographics of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnic Racial Background</th>
<th>Region Currently Living in</th>
<th>Region Brought up in</th>
<th>Country/Place of Birth</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
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<td>Alice (F1)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian American/Korean</td>
<td>NYC (Manhattan)</td>
<td>Queens, NY</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
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<td>Isabella (F2)</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
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<td>Central NJ &amp; Long Island, NY</td>
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<td>Queens, NY</td>
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<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Queens &amp; Long Island, NY</td>
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<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
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<td>South Korea</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Queens, NY</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Queens, NY</td>
<td>Seoul, South Korea</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Queens, NY</td>
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<td>Great Neck, NY</td>
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## Appendix B: Demographics of the Participants (Continued)

<table>
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<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
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<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Mother’s Country of Birth</th>
<th>Father’s Country of Birth</th>
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<th>Father’s Citizenship</th>
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<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lily (F4)</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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## Appendix B: Demographics of the Participants (Continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
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<th>Father's Education</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Primary Language</th>
<th>Second Language &amp; Fluency</th>
<th>Language Spoken at Home</th>
<th>Food Preferences</th>
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<td>Korean, Vietnamese, Thai, almost all Asian food, Mexican, Italian</td>
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<td>English</td>
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Appendix C: The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R)  
(Phinney & Ong, 2007)

The following questions ask you questions about your Ethnic Identity. Remember there are no right or wrong answers, just answer as accurately as possible. Use the scale below to answer the questions. If you strongly agree with the statement write down 5; if you strongly disagree write down 1. If the statement is more or less true of you, find the number between 1 and 5 that best describes you.

- Strongly disagree 1
- Disagree 2
- Neutral 3
- Agree 4
- Strongly agree 5

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I have often done things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I have often talked to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.</td>
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### Appendix D: A Sample Coding Sheet

#### Identity in Sociocultural Context: Life Stories of Korean Youth in New York City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding System</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
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<td>Dialogue (DG)</td>
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<td>Caring/ Help (CH)</td>
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### Identity in Sociocultural Context: Life Stories of Korean Youth in New York City Coding System

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