

Lost Between Two Cultures: Construction of Ethnic Identity in Korean Adoptees Adopted Into American Families

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Research Questions

- Are Korean adoptees struggling with their ethnic identity?
- What factors influence the ethnic self-identification of Korean adoptees?

Theses

- This study suggests that Korean adoptees are struggling with their ethnic identification, and that parents' emphasis on Korean culture, as well as acts of discrimination and prejudice against the adoptee affected ethnic exploration and identification.

Literature Review

- Parents of Transracial and Multiracial Adoptions
- Between Cultures and “Reculturation”
- Alternative Research

Transracial and Multiracial Adoptions

- Ishizawa et al. (2006)
 - Parent's effort and age of adoption
- Tuan and Shiao (2011)
 - Exploring ethnicity
- Johnson et al. (2007); Crolley-Simic and Vonk (2011)
 - White mother's connection to identity

Between Cultures

- Baden, Treweeke, and Muninder (2012)
 - reculturation
- Kearly (2002)
 - Personal account
- Lee (2006)
 - 1.5 generation

Alternative Research

- Kim (1995)
 - Adoptees are well assimilated

Social Construction Theory

- Berger and Luckmann (1966)
- Constructing ethnic identity more specifically
 - Danico (2004)
 - Identity Optional-Situational Perspective
- Ethnic layering
 - Nagel (1994)

Methodology

- Online survey
 - Demographic information
 - Questions relating to participants' adoption
 - Respondents' current knowledge of Korea
 - Adoptees' knowledge and perception of their ethnic identity
- Participants recruited from online sources such as Yahoo chat groups, with a majority from Facebook

Demographics

- Adoptees were required to be 18+ years of age, adopted into American families, and to have lived in the US for at least 7 years.
- 30 completed surveys
 - Ages 19-over 50
 - 20 females, 10 males
 - 18 states and 2 other countries
 - All but one adopted by white parents
 - Parents married at the time of the adoption

Key Variables

- Independent
 - Parents' emphasis on Korean customs, language, or food
 - Discrimination
 - Prejudice
- Dependent
 - Curiosity about Korea
 - Opinions on how much emphasis the parents placed on Korean culture
 - Ethnic Identification

Coding and Data Analysis

- 51 questions
 - Multiple choice and open ended
- Quantitative methods
 - SPSS
- Responses to open ended question were used to further support evidence gathered from the answers to close ended questions

Findings and Analysis

Table 1a. Relationship Between Parents' Emphasis on Korean Culture and Adoptees' Curiosity

	<u>Parents Emphasized Korean Culture</u>		Total
	Yes	No	
Adoptees' Curiosity (yes responses)			
Taken Class on Korean Culture	5 (29.4%)	0 (0%)	5 (16.7%)
Taken Class on Korean Language	5 (29.4%)	5 (38.5%)	10 (33.3)
Have Visited Korea	11 (64.7%)	8 (61.5%)	19 (63.3%)
Wish to Visit Korea	17 (100%)	12 (92.3%)	29 (96.7%)
Want to Learn More	17 (100%)	12 (92.3%)	29 (16.7%)
Total N	17	13	30

*Totals will not equal 100%. Each row is a separate question from the survey.

Table 1b. Relationship Between Parents' Emphasis on Korean Culture and Adoptees' Ethnic Identification

	<u>Parents Emphasized Korean Culture</u>		Total
	Yes	No	
Adoptees' Ethnic Identification (yes responses)			
American	4 (23.5%)	1 (7.7%)	5 (16.7)
Depends	3 (17.6%)	8 (61.5%)	11 (36.7%)
Korean	1 (5.9%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)
Korean American	8 (47.1%)	2 (15.4%)	10 (33.3%)
None	1 (5.9%)	2 (15.4%)	3 (10%)
Total N	17 (100%)	13 (100%)	30 (100%)

Table 2a. Relationship Between Experiences of Discrimination and Adoptees' Curiosity

	<u>Experienced Discrimination</u>		Total
	Yes	No	
Adoptees' Curiosity (yes responses)			
Taken Class on Korean Culture	4 (19%)	1 (11.1%)	5 (16.7%)
Taken Class on Korean Language	7 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	10 (33.3%)
Have Visited Korea	13 (61.9%)	6 (66.7%)	19 (63.3%)
Wish to Visit Korea	20 (95.2%)	9 (100%)	29 (96.7%)
Want to Learn More	20 (95.2%)	9 (100%)	29 (96.7%)
Total N	21	9	30

*Totals will not equal 100%. Each row is a separate question from the survey.

Table 2b. Relationship Between Experiences of Discrimination and Adoptees' Ethnic Identification

	<u>Experienced Discrimination</u>		Total
	Yes	No	
Adoptees' Ethnic Identification (yes responses)			
American	3 (14.3%)	2 (22.2%)	5 (16.7%)
Depends	9 (42.9%)	2 (22.2%)	11 (36.7%)
Korean	1 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)
Korean American	6 (28.6%)	4 (44.4%)	10 (33.3%)
None	2 (9.5%)	1 (11.1%)	3 (10%)
Total N	21 (100%)	9 (100%)	30 (100%)

Table 3a. Relationship Between Experiences of Prejudice and Adoptees' Curiosity

	<u>Experienced Prejudice</u>		Total
	Yes	No	
Adoptees' Curiosity (yes responses)			
Taken Class on Korean Culture	4 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	5 (16.7%)
Taken Class on Korean Language	8 (33.3%)	2 (33.3%)	10 (33.3%)
Have Visited Korea	17 (70.8%)	2 (33.3%)	19 (63.3%)
Wish to Visit Korea	23 (95.8%)	6 (100%)	29 (96.7%)
Want to Learn More	23 (95.8%)	6 (100%)	29 (96.7%)
Total N	24	6	30

*Totals will not equal 100%. Each row is a separate question from the survey.

Table 3b. Relationship Between Experiences of Prejudice and Adoptees' Ethnic Identification

	<u>Experienced Prejudice</u>		Total
	Yes	No	
Adoptees' Ethnic Identification (yes responses)			
American	4 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	5 (16.7%)
Depends	10 (41.7%)	1 (16.7%)	11 (36.7%)
Korean	1 (4.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)
Korean American	6 (25%)	4 (66.7%)	10 (33.3%)
None	3 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	3 (10%)
Total N	24 (100%)	6 (100%)	30 (100%)

Major Findings Recap

- Adoptees did not actively search for courses on Korean culture, but were still curious and had a desire to learn more about their birth culture.
- The majority who had parental emphasis on Korean culture ethnically identified as Korean American.
 - Those who did not identify mostly depending on the situation.
- The majority who had experienced discrimination or prejudice identified depending on the situation.
 - Those who had not identified mostly as Korean American.

Conclusions

- Kim was incorrect
- Koreans are struggling with their ethnic identity, especially those who had experienced discrimination or prejudice.

“I feel more like an American that happened to be born in Korea. I do not feel connected to Korea, however being born in Korea has influenced the way I have been treated in America.”

Implications

- Parents should place some emphasis on Korean culture.
 - This might eliminate negative feelings about their Korean heritage after experiences of discrimination or prejudice.
- In depth interviews would lead to more insight into which experiences in particular influence the ethnic identities of Korean adoptees
- Future Research could explore whether gender and age influence the ethnic identities of Korean adoptees.



Thank You