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RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND CLASS IDENTITIES OF KOREAN ADOPTEES  
IN MINNESOTA AND THE FACTORS FOR THEIR DECISION TO PURSUE  
POST-BACCALAUREATE EDUCATION

By

NAYOUNG HEO

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN ETHNIC AND MULTICULTURAL STUDIES

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

MANKATO, MINNESOTA

MAY 2013

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Racial, Ethnic, and Class Identities of Korean Adoptees in Minnesota and the Factors for  
Their Decision to Pursue Post-Baccalaureate Education

Nayoung Heo

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the thesis  
committee.

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## ABSTRACT

RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND CLASS IDENTITIES OF KOREAN ADOPTEES

IN MINNESOTA AND THE FACTORS FOR THEIR DECISION TO PURSUE POST-  
BACCALAUREATE EDUCATION

NAYOUNG HEO, MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE

ETHNIC AND MULTICULTURAL STUDIES

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO – MAY 2013

Statement of problem: This study is an attempt to (1) explore the six Korean adoptees ethnic, racial, and class identities and (2) recognize the factors that influence the interviewees' pursuit of post-graduate education. Even though this study focuses on three types of identities, other factors for their establishment of identities were not ignored.

Methods: Two Korean adoptees from Minnesota were recruited as interviewees through an acquaintance and then the snow ball sampling method was used to recruit four more Korean adoptees, three from Minnesota and one from an adjacent area. Face-to-face interviews were used as the primary method for collecting data, and not only the 27

questions on the interview schedule, but also follow-up questions were asked. Findings: The interviewees identified themselves as Korean or Korean American even though their ethnic identity was contextual, and they distinguished themselves from second generation Korean Americans. Racially, they admitted they are viewed as Asian, but they preferred identifying themselves as Korean specifically to being lumped in an indistinguishable

category. Affluent upbringing gave them a sense of belonging in the middle or upper-middle class category. Regarding the factors for their decision to pursue post-baccalaureate education, five categories were found: personal goals, education achievements of parents, personal experiences, environmental factors, and job market/economic reasons.

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## ORGANIZATION OF THESIS

The thesis has five chapters, a bibliography section and an appendix. The chapter contents are:

1. Chapter I identifies the research problem, purpose and objectives of the study.
2. Chapter II examines the review of related literature about ethnic, racial, class identities of Korean adoptees.
3. Chapter III explains the research methods employed, face-to-face interview.
4. Chapter IV discusses the research findings based on the analysis of the interviews and field notes.
5. Chapter V summarizes the findings and implications for future research on Korean adoptees in higher education.



## CHAPTER I

### RESEARCH PROBLEM

#### Introduction

This study is an attempt to explore (1) the ethnic, racial, and class identities of the six Korean adoptees from Minnesota and (2) understand the factors that influenced their decision to pursue a postgraduate degree, using a face-to-face interview method. This study focused on the three types of identities because the most studied about Korean adoptees are ethnic and racial identities (most of the times these two have been used interchangeably) in the previous literature, and Korean adoptees are adopted by (upper) middle-class couples, which is a common pattern among Korean adoptee households. A review of the previous literature about the Korean adoptees' ethnic, racial, and class identities is provided to explore different views of identities of Korean adoptees and their education. The history of Korean adoption was not included because there was no need to repeat summarizing the history, which has already been well-discussed in previous literature<sup>1</sup>.

Regarding the decision to pursue post-graduate education, even though it seems that individuals choose to pursue post-baccalaureate education because it enables them to be more committed and focused in a specific field to obtain intensified knowledge and

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<sup>1</sup> If you are interested in reading about the history of Korean adoption, check one of these websites: <http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/proed/korfindings.html> or [http://www.tobiashubINETTE.se/adoption\\_history.pdf](http://www.tobiashubINETTE.se/adoption_history.pdf) or the article, Nissen (2011) or the book, Kim (2007). For the adoption history of the U.S. in general, it is briefly described in <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/adoptionstatistics.htm>.

critical thinking, there are factors other than education-related ones that influence the decision to obtain post-graduate education, such as, the current job market, expectations or advice from others, personal experiences (going abroad, meeting new people, finding birth parents, establishing firmer identity, etc.).

I chose to interview Korean adoptees raised in Minnesota who are in post-graduate education because Minnesota has several characteristics that are distinguished from other states. First of all, it was noted that there is a highly educated adult population in the state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2004) (as quoted in Statemaster.com), 32.5% of people 25 or older in Minnesota held a bachelor's degree or higher, and the state was ranked 10<sup>th</sup> among 51 states. It tells that in general adults older than 25 as of 2004 were highly educated compared to other states that were ranked below the state. This tendency might also have influenced adopted Koreans who were graduating from college.

Second, Korean adoptees are densely populated in Minnesota compared to any other state. Minnesota has the largest number of Korean adoptees in the U.S., estimated at 20,000 or more (Koo, 2008; Korean Quarterly, 2013; March, 2010), and it exceeded the number of Korean Americans<sup>2</sup> in the state. Considering the estimation that the total number of adopted children in Minnesota as of 2000 was more than 38,500 (Kreider, 2003); Korean adoption placements have been decreasing since the 1990s (Holt International, 2013); the current number of adopted Korean children in Minnesota did not

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper, A Korean American is defined as 1st, 1.5, 2nd, or 3rd generation Korean Americans that do not include Korean adoptees, as the interviewees distinguished themselves from those.

go through a big fluctuation since, it can be easily concluded that Korean adoptees account for around 52% of the total number of adoption placements in Minnesota based on the statistics.

Lastly, Minnesota has the highest concentration of Korean culture camps, such as, the Korean Culture Camp, Kamp Kinchee, Camp Chosôn, Camp Tiger, Kamp Chin-gu, and Camp Moon-Hwa, where Korean Americans, Koran adoptees, or both can learn about Korea and its culture; there are a lot of states that do not even have a culture camp (Culture Camps, 2013). However, this pattern seems natural when the relatively large population of Korean adoptees in Minnesota is visible.

### **Research Objectives**

These are the objectives that the current study is aimed for:

1. To conduct face-to-face interviews with Korean adoptees from Minnesota who have pursued post-baccalaureate education.
2. To understand how the interviewees identify themselves in terms of ethnicity, race, and class.
3. To discover the factors that influenced the interviewees' decision to pursue post-graduate education.
4. To conclude the analysis and provide suggestions for future research about Korean adoptees in higher education.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Howard (2000), the development of multi-faceted identities in an individual rather than the notion of one “true” identity for the person is the current view in the contemporary literature about the concept of social identity, which has a significant implications for Korean adoptees’ identity formation. The factors of race, ethnicity and class have been frequently discussed in previous literature in terms of Korean adoptees’ identity development processes.

Among them, the term ethnic identity is a highly debatable term because it is defined differently depending on the individual who uses that term. Tajfel (1981) (as cited in Phinney, 1990) defined ethnic identity as “an individual’s self-concept which derives from knowledge of membership in a social group, together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (p.500).” However, others view ethnic identity with the focus on self-labeling aspect of people, on feelings or attitudes, or on cultural aspects. Recognizing the complexity of defining the term ethnic identity in his review of 70 studies about ethnic identity, Phinney (1990) categorized several components and aspects of ethnic identity after reviewing literature. Among them, self-identification (i.e. self-definition or self-labeling) as a component and the contextual factors of ethnic identity as a characteristic of ethnic identity are highly relevant to the study. Self-identification component refers to the instance when an individual chooses an ethnic label for him or herself, whether the term is “correct” or “incorrect (p.503).”

Regarding contextual factors, Phinney (1990) summarizes that ethnic identity is flexible depending on the context that an individual is in. Fluidity of ethnic and racial identity was also noted in Frable (1997).

Issues related to Korean adoptees' ethnic identities have been introduced in previous literature (Kim, 2009; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Rosenwald, 2009; Kim, 2007). As individuals who are caught between two different cultures, Korean and American, Korean adoptees are likely to develop more unique identities compared to individuals who were raised in an ethnically and racially homogeneous family. As suggested in the study of Lee et al. (2010), identities of Korean adoptees in college can be characterized differently from those of Korean American students who were born and raised in or immigrated to the U.S. before they became 12 years old. The adoptees were rarely exposed to Korean culture while growing up, unless they made an extra commitment to participate in cultural activities, such as joining a Korean Church, eating Korean food, and attending a Korean Culture Camp, which tended to be daily basis in ethnically homogeneous Korean American households. This study also pointed out that the adopted Korean students' mean score on the items for measuring ethnic identity was lower than U.S.-born/immigrant Korean Americans (Lee et al. 2010). The adoptees' tendency to racially identify themselves as Asian but less strongly associate with ethnic Korean than White, might explain their complex identity development processes in terms of how they view themselves and how other people perceive them.

Supporting this tendency is Samuels's (2010) study of Black/biracial adoptees raised in a middle/upper-class White household. Outwardly, biracial adoptees see themselves as "Black," yet they culturally associate themselves with "White," which is a racial but culturally descriptive term as well in this case. Racial and ethnic identities of Korean adoptees could be assumed to develop in a similar way, considering that Korean adoptees are racially and ethnically different from their adoptive families but acculturated as "White." It might be the case where the adoptees might not even have a choice to know about their culture of origin because of their upbringing, and therefore it is expected by other people that the adoptees consider themselves and act "White." Both ethnic and racial identities seem to be developed in a social context where access to opportunities for cultural exploration and resources, and the level of racial and ethnic diversity are uniquely available (Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

The argument that ethnic minority students start to intensely explore their identities in college years, presented by Syed and Azmitia (2009), might have a significant implication for the Korean adoptees' exploration of their ethnic identities. Syed and Azmitia. (2009) pointed out that greater self-esteem is partly associated with an establishment of a strong ethnic identity, which was also argued by Phinney (1990) as well. Similarly, ethnic minority adolescents' intense ethnic identity exploration was discussed by Newman (2005). Even though Korean adoptees' exploration of their ethnic identity could be either as Korean, Korean American, or neither of the two, their higher self-esteem achieved through an establishment of a stronger ethnic identity may be related to their better adjustment in school and, therefore, better academic achievements.

However, there is a possibility that this finding might be more applicable to first, second, or third generation hyphenated Americans, not adopted individuals.

The development of a class identity was implicitly indicated in the tendency for Korean adoptees to be mostly adopted by middle or upper class<sup>3</sup> Caucasian couples. Sacerdote (2007) conducted a survey to examine the relationship between family environments and Korean adoptee children's outcomes. In this study, he found that Korean adoptees placed in small, highly educated families spent more years in college and were more likely to graduate from a U.S. News ranked college. They also exhibited the likelihood of a higher income when parental education level is high and the family size is small. Korean adoptees might form a class identity according to the family environment that they were raised in and choose a similar path to what their parents or siblings took, going to a better school and earning more money throughout their lives.

The tendencies that Korean children are mostly adopted by middle or upper class couples and adoptee infants are cared for better in foster care facilities before being adopted (Holt International, 2013) partly explain findings related to Korean adoptees who are more highly educated or show better academic performance than other interracial adoptees. In their research of male international (n=2,314) and national adoptees

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<sup>3</sup> Currently, the Bureau of Consular Affairs (U.S. Department of State) requires all the applicants for adopting a Korean child to have "an income higher than the U.S. national average and be sufficient to support the adoptive child". According to the United States Census (U.S. Department of Commerce), the median income of U.S households was \$50,054 (the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile) and the mean income was \$69,677, as of 2011. In this paper, middle-class is loosely defined as a category where the household income is between the 40<sup>th</sup> (lower limit \$38,520) and 60<sup>th</sup> (lower limit \$62,434) percentiles for a guidance purpose (c.f. Matthews, 2012). However, the interviewees' self-identification of themselves with a specific class category was considered rather important in this study, because the act of self-identifying was thought to be more influential when answering questions than the actual belongingness in a class category was.

(n=1,153), Dalen et al. (2008) pointed out that Korean adoptees in Sweden had pursued post-secondary education more often than the general population, which was in connection with their other finding that male Korean adoptees had slightly better scores in military conscription tests. The same study, referring to more than nine studies in Europe, also discussed the tendency for Korean adoptees to show higher cognitive competence, language skills, and better school performance than the adoptees from other countries. In the findings of Freundlich et al. (2000), even though the size of the sample was small, 42 percent of 167 Korean adoptees in the U.S. surveyed had a college degree and 24 percent had a graduate degree. Korean adoptees' high educational achievements discussed in previous literature can be influenced by various personal and social factors, which contribute to the adoptee individuals' identity development.



## Chapter III

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized face-to-face interviews with Korean adoptee individuals, who are currently enrolled in either a graduate school or a professional school. The ratio of females and males was not considered as a significant factor because even accessing Korean adoptees that have pursued post-graduate education was difficult; data simply is not available. I believe in-depth interviews with Korean adoptees enabled me to approach the topic in a more personal way than a mass survey method would have done, and to pay attention to the details of their stories, which might be missed if they were generalized by statistics.

#### **Data Collection Method**

Two Korean adoptees have been recruited through my acquaintance and then a type of nonprobability sampling, the snow ball sampling method (Bernard, 2011, p.147), was used to recruit more four Korean adoptees. I was able to conduct separate interviews with six individuals, and each interview took an hour or an hour and a half if more additional questions came up. Five of them were raised in Minnesota and the other one was from Wisconsin, a city about twenty minutes or less away from Minnesota. This individual was included as well in this study because of the proximity of her hometown to Minnesota, a lot of Minnesotan Korean adoptee friends of hers, and her participation in activities related to Korean culture in Minnesota. The order of questions was adjusted depending on the interviewees' responses, and every session was not only voice-recorded,

but also recorded in the researcher's notes with the subject's permission. Voice-recorded files were transcribed after by the researcher.

### **Interviewee Profiles**

All of the six interviewees are currently attending graduate school or professional school. Their real names, the names of their hometowns, and information about their siblings, if applicable, were excluded from the profiles in order to protect the interviewees' confidentiality. The racial demographics for each of the interviewee's hometowns is provided below. Four of the interviewees were the only child in their respective families, and all six interviewees had Caucasian parents. The sample included five female interviewees and one male interviewee. Because recruiting a next interviewee was based on the recommendation of a prior interviewee, the imbalance of the sex ratio of the interviewees was not intended.

1. David (pseudonym), 26: David was raised in Minnesota since he was 11 month old. His adoption was processed by the Eastern Social Welfare Society in Seoul, Korea and Children's Home Society & Family Services<sup>4</sup> in Minnesota, the U.S. His hometown has a population of 20,000, with the 90% Caucasian inhabitants, as of the 2010 U.S. Census. It is a suburban close to Minneapolis and St. Paul.
2. Sally (pseudonym), 24: She was adopted when she was 8 months old. She also went through the Eastern Social Welfare Society and Children's Home

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<sup>4</sup> The Children's Home Society & Family Services and Lutheran Social Services had been separate organizations until they merged for budget purposes in 2012 (Hopfensperger, 2012).

Society & Family Services. She is from a suburban city, close to the Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul). About 80% of the population was Caucasian according to the U.S. Census.

3. Linda (pseudonym), 25: She was raised in a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota with the population of around 25,000, and the Caucasian population of her hometown accounted for 90%. Her adoption agencies were the Children's Home Society & Family Services and Eastern Social Welfare Society.
4. Lyn (pseudonym), 26: Her parents adopted her when she was 5 months old. She was raised in a city populated with 25,000 people, close to the Twin Cities. The percentage of the Caucasian population was nearly 90%. She was also adopted through the Children's Home Society & Family Services and Eastern Social Welfare Society.
5. Carol (pseudonym), 23: She was adopted when she was five month years old through the Lutheran Social Services in the U.S. and Eastern Social Welfare Society in Korea. She was raised in a city with the population of 27,000 in Wisconsin, but very close to Minnesota. 90% of the population was White.
6. Ellen (pseudonym), 26: She was 4 months old at the time of adoption. Her adoption agencies were the Eastern Social Welfare Society in Korea and Children's Home Society in the U.S. Her hometown is diverse compared to other interviewees' hometowns, but her neighborhood was mainly inhabited by Caucasians.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

I organized this chapter into several sections that include interviewees' (1) ethnic identity, (2) racial identity, (3) class identity, and (4) factors that influenced their decision to pursue post-graduate education.

#### 1. Ethnic Identity

I focused on how the interviewees define themselves in terms of ethnicity (this also applied to racial and class identities), because their “self-identification (Phinney, 1990, p.503)” might be different than what their parents, friends, or other people would think of them as. During the interviews, one commonality was that they defined themselves as Korean or Korean American, hyphenated or not, when asked about their ethnicity. However, when they said they are Korean American, it was in a different sense than one that second or third generation Korean Americans might have (c.f. Lee et al., 2010; Glover, 2010; Kim, 2007), which strengthened the importance of self-identification. Their common explanation for defining themselves as Korean American is well-shown in these excerpts of the interviews with Sally and Linda.

Sally: Right now, it's just like I'm Korean American... It's sort of wanting to have *both* [emphasis added] (Korean and American sides).

Linda: I guess I always – I think I view myself as Korean American, I guess. I feel like I'm a mix of *both* [emphasis added], you know.

Even though views of other people about them could also have influenced the self-concepts of the interviewees, it seemed that identifying themselves on their own was more significant at this point of their lives. David answered the question about how he defines himself in terms of ethnicity:

I think Korean Americans have parents, that, like, moved and they are like second generation. They have very different experience from I have. To say that I'm Korean American is not quite right, cause I don't feel like I have *that* [emphasis added] experience. Um, if anything I feel like Korean AND American, but like in a *separate* [emphasis added] sense, because about the differences in experience that I have, like, when I go to Korea, my life is very different there, or was different, like living there versus here.

David admitted that he identifies himself as Korean in terms of ethnicity. However, he distinguished himself from second generation Korean Americans, because he does not have Korean parents. This was also revealed in the interview with Sally. She said:

It pointed out to me more, like, even though I was hanging out more, like, Korean people or Asian people, it also made me aware that I was *different* [emphasis added]. So like, for example, if a bunch of my friends were there speaking Korean, I could mostly understand them but sometimes I wouldn't know what they were talking about or I couldn't – like, my vocabulary wasn't as good. So it made kinda realize that “oh, there's something *missing* [emphasis added], like, I didn't grow up speaking Korean (like other second generation Korean Americans or Korean nationals).

However, two other interviewees did not necessarily distinguish themselves from second or third generation Korean Americans, but rather tried to view themselves and the Korean Americans in an inclusive category. Lyn shared unexpected moments in college when she encountered Korean Americans:

...when I went to college and I remember that was the first time I had really seen, like, Koreans or second generation Koreans... Sometimes I have to say that was the one point my life where I actually felt not accepted I was actually by, you know, people of my own race and I remember feeling kind of awkward about that, you know, here I was excited to be around Korean people and everything, and I actually felt that they kinda, like, looked down on some of us being adopted, you know. Like, "You don't know the heritage" and we didn't speak the language... It's such a weird kinda thing... I just thought "Oh, everyone's Korean," you know, like, we are all *unified* [emphasis added]. But I didn't know that there was this distinction, you know, between second generation Koreans and Koreans that were international students. I guess I was kind of naïve about all that. I didn't really understand that there was the distinction.

Another pattern that emerged during the interviews was that their ethnic identities have not always been as firm as now. This does not mean that their current ethnic identities are completely solid, but actually they are still flexible and changing. This finding is related to the notion in Syed and Azmitia (2009) that ethnic exploration and commitment occur not only among adolescents but also during college years, and they increased gradually during college years. The interviewees' ethnic identity as Korean seems to grow more as they involve themselves in various activities related to Korean

culture growing up, such as, Korean culture camps and language camps, and experiences of actually going to Korea. Their involvement in these activities can be also compared to the tendency of college students involving various experiences in and out of class, observed in Terenzini (1994). Linda shared the impact of cultural participation on her:

...I think that not so much college, but... living in Korea probably had a stronger impact on my identity... I think a large part of it was language acquisition... And also, I think that, like, my involvement in traditional drumming, like, Samulnori (a traditional genre of Korean percussion music), and traditional arts... For me, I guess, like, that is the part of Korean culture that draws me the most.

David added:

I think it [my ethnic identity]'s definitely becoming more *Koreanized* [emphasis added], if that's the word, um, just because of all the experience I had during college with Korea and obviously like being able to speak more, and you need to practice speaking, you usually got more Korean friends, so that's part of it.

The formation of their Korean identity or gaining knowledge about Korean culture might have been most likely helped or initiated by their parents. All of the interviewees agreed that their parents<sup>5</sup> were very supportive or even passionate about their children's cultural exploration and finding birth parents. In detail, it was their parents who registered them for a Korean Culture Camp in Minnesota or Wisconsin; the parents openly explained to the interviewees when and how they were adopted; they gave

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<sup>5</sup> In this study, the term "parent" refers to an interviewee's adoptive parent. "Birth parents" or "birth family" are used later on to designate their actual birth parents or family in Korea.

their children support when searching for their birth parents (or for some interviewees, the initiation of a searching process was encouraged by the adoptive parents than the interviewees themselves); or they went to Korea with their children to learn about Korea together. Here is an excerpt from the interview with David:

They are really supportive, like, "when I first met my Korean family". I think my dad was more excited than I was. Cause I was just like "Oh." And they didn't know how to feel about it for a while. They were very excited. Um, they were really supportive of what I want to... When I wanted to go to Korea for a year my mom was very supportive and then tried to help me out figure out all the details for that.

However, it does not seem this is always the case for some other Korean adoptees. Lyn not only explained having parents who are open and supportive about their child exploring her roots is definitely a lucky thing but also expressed concern for the parents who are not supportive:

Like, some Korean adoptee friends that have, like, their parents don't want them to find about their birth family at all... I do have a couple friends whose parents would be offended, their parents here, if they ever wanted to pursue searching for their birth family. They will tell, like, "I'm your mother. I'm the only mother that you have," you know, which is very different than my parents... I mean I just feel like it's kind of weird because it's like, you know, you adopted this child and you know that you are not the ones that gave birth to them and there could be someone out there. I just always thought that was kind of weird, you know. It just kind of comes with the ((laughs)) territory, I guess.



Lastly, another interesting characteristic that was discovered from the interviewees is that their ethnic identity is defined differently depending on the situation that they are in, which Phinney (1990) and Howard (2000) have noted as well. In other words, their ethnic identity is not a rigid identity that does not change at all, but it rather transforms or “switches” (as Carol described in her interview) depending on the place an individual goes to or the people the person interacts with. This pattern was observed in all of the interviewees as they described their everyday interactions with different people and in various environments. This fluidity of ethnic identity is very significant, because it seems to be part of the reason why they define themselves as “Korean American.” They seem to want to have both ethnic and cultural heritages and better define themselves who experience a lot of “switching” everyday. Carol and David explained:

Carol: ...it gets complicated especially if I'm interacting with Korean Americans or Koreans versus non-Koreans or -Korean Americans. You know, it's like, all culturally switch if it's not someone Korean I'm talking to... I'm mostly American. Yeah, pretty much mostly American, but then randomly I will turn really Korean with something or other and then it's confusing for everybody. ((Laughs))... If I'm with a bunch of foreigners like I am right now, like, last night I hung out with my Pakistani friend and my French friend and my other American friend, I'd identify myself as an American, but then again, I am Korean American in Korea. It's a very different experience I'm having versus, like, my French friend, for example. So I'm very aware that, you know, like, it's a little different.

David: ...I feel like it really depends on who I'm with. Because, like, living in Korea you learn, like, Korean manners and how to, like, you know, be Korean. But when you are hanging out with your White friends, it feels like living back in (his hometown). So, I don't know, um, I guess I feel like I can interact with both? Like, Koreans AND White people? ((Chuckles))

A unique aspect that was observed from the interview with Linda is that she also considered her Jewish heritage as an important aspect in her identity in terms of culture. She defined herself as Jewish Korean American Adoptee. It seemed that Jewish traditions are deeply ingrained in her family and they were practiced on a daily basis. When asked how the Jewish aspect of her identity influenced her, Linda answered:

I think that it was a positive experience, because I feel like it kind of gave me *counterbalance* [emphasis added] to my, like, Korean and American identity.

However, she remembered instances of discrimination against her in the Jewish community, not really from other people.

Actually my mother is Jewish and I was raised Jewish. And I think most of the discrimination I faced was actually from within the Jewish community, because of the very homogeneous community and there's not a lot of ethnic diversity. So, like, I think mom – she said she tried to put me in, like, Jewish pre-school cause now the kids would play with me. And I remember going to, like, Jewish summer camps and stuff like that, and people would make, like, insensitive remarks because they were ignorant or whatever.

All in all, the ways they identify themselves in term of ethnicity has a common ground, and that their identity as Korean or Korean American seems to have grown over time as they interacted with other people from various backgrounds, participated in cultural activities, visited Korea, and searched for or communicated with the birth family. However, their ethnic identity definitely has unique characteristics compared to that of Korean Americans who were raised by immigrant Korean parents with Korean culture ingrained in them.

## 2. Racial Identity

It seems that the interviewees have developed their racial identity gradually, and their identity became more solidified than before after entering college (c.f. Syed & Azmitia, 2009). Their encounter with a lot more international students, Asian Americans, or other individuals from different racial categories seemed to help them recognize and establish their identity. A pattern observed during the interviews was that they used racial and ethnic terms interchangeably. In detail, sometimes they would identify themselves as Korean American, but other times the terms Asian or Asian American were used instead. However, when they used the latter, the terms were more likely to be used in a context in which negative stereotypes were associated. For example, it seemed that using these terms implied that they recognized their status of being of a minority population, other people's view of them as smart students without making efforts, or being regarded as receiving advantage because of their minority status, or being made fun of when they were younger. David remembered a moment when an offensive remark was directed

toward him in the church he used to go to as a child. An interesting aspect of this story is that the denotation that is considered to be used offensively refer to African Americans was used to refer to David. It seemed that the male in this story considered all the people who are seemingly from other categories of race are the same:

There was one event in our church that we used to go to. I think the church had a fair and these games for kids. And this old White dude, “Why is there – *N-word* [emphasis added] in my church?” directed towards ME. And like, my mom went off and was upset and yelled at the guy and we just stopped going to that church ((Chuckles)).

Lyn also remembered the biased perception of some people toward the fact that she was granted a scholarship for her graduate school:

I think that a lot of times there’s the perception of being minority and getting into medical school or getting into any professional program or getting scholarships, people are always like... “Oh, you probably got it ‘cause you are minority” and I was like, “No, I took the time writing an essay,”... I’ve talked to other people, like, other Asians and stuff particularly, and I don’t know if they realize that we don’t get any favor. ((laughs))... They almost view Asians as almost, you know, “almost the same as Caucasians” sometimes in the graduate school for all (academic matters)... You still work just as hard as you get into graduate school, but people still have that perception, always.

Here is Carol’s reaction to the term “model minority,” which is designated for Asian Americans who are “supposed” to be smart, submissive, and have the “American dream (Model Minority Stereotype for Asian Americans, 2013; Nissen, 2011)”

I think I resented being called that in high school or having others allude to that in high school, especially since – it’s really funny the model minority supposedly exists because of hard core Asian parents and I was like “I don’t have those!” ((Laughs)) I don’t see how I fit into this stereotype at all. I do resent that stereotype because that implies that we’re submissive to meet and I don’t think that’s what it actually should mean. I think that other people call us that out of resentment.

One thing that was noticed from the interviews is that the interviewees did not necessarily identify themselves as Asian American. As Smedley (1998) mentioned that “the physical markers of race status are always open to interpretation by others (p.697),” the fact that they are already considered as Asian by other people so that they did not have to point that out was part of it, and second, it seemed that they preferred identifying themselves specifically as Korean American or Korean than *being* categorized Asian American by other people. This aspect seems to be related to the notion that an individual’s psychological orientation toward his or her racial category is more associated with racial identity than membership to that category per se is (Carter & Goodwin, 2012; Frable, 1997). The term Asian or Asian American might have been thought by the interviewees as a category that just put them all together in indiscriminately and also a label that implies that they belong to the minority category. Linda touches on this aspect.

I come from a pretty, like, White Area. It’s like a suburb. But, I think I’ve mentioned there are actually a fair number of like Chinese families live over there. So I felt like my school was very, like, White with some Chinese kids thrown in. So I think a lot of people lumped me in with them.

However, racial identity seems like an important aspect for another interviewee, Carol, to define herself, even though she does not accept the stereotypes associated with Asian Americans. It seemed that she recognizes that she belongs to the minority category, and that she finds herself in a big category of Asian Americans that are moving together toward racial justice. Carol defined Asian America as:

Asian America, um, I mean, like, fighting for rights as a person of color as a racial minority... I recognize that I'm a person of color in America, and I'm a racial minority. But culturally speaking Asian America usually means second generation, 1.5 generation thingy, but I think that as you evolve as a community. I think that more adoptees will join in, once we feel comfortable with it, cause we are coming from two different backgrounds, you know... (Asian American is) definitely a political term that I choose for myself, I think other people would use that to describe themselves racially – I use it to mean racially and politically.

Even though the extent to which they identify themselves as Asian American, and how the stereotypes about Asian Americans affected themselves differed depending on the interviewee, it seemed clear that they wanted to define themselves with their own words on a more personal level. Sally's effort to view and establish herself as a whole well explains the tendency:

Um, I think nowadays, I try to sort of be myself as more like a whole person. Like, before, I think it's so easy to be like "Oh, I'm Korean American and I'm adopted," and that's it. But I think nowadays, that's a part of it, like "Yes, I'm Korean and I'm American and I'm adopted and I'm, you know, female and I'm a student, then I'm – I'm of this class,

and I've come from this community.” So I try to look at it as more of like a bigger picture, like all of these things make up who I am. So it's not just a few things, it's more like all of these things together.

### 3. Class Identity

Historically, social class has been defined as “as the position of groups and individuals occupy within hierarchies of occupation, power, wealth, and status (Galen, 2010)”, This research recognizes the interplay of class identity with other identities (Howard, 2000) such as, ethnicity, and race, and considers class identity mobile, either upward and downward; therefore, both occupational hierarchy as well as daily social interactions (Galen, 2010) will be seen as significant. In detail, the means of access to education, necessities, daily choices, and the neighborhood of a certain class were all taken into account when analyzing the interviewees' class identities.

A common aspect that was found from the interviews regarding their class factors was that one of the emphases both of the interviewees and their parents had in their lives was education. And the interviewees' education was well-supported financially by their parents. All of the interviewees placed their families in the categories of middle class<sup>6</sup> or upper-middle class, and admitted that they did not feel limited growing up - four of them

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<sup>6</sup> Currently, the Bureau of Consular Affairs (U.S. Department of State) requires all the adoptive family applicants for Korean adoptees to have “an income higher than the U.S. national average and be sufficient to support the adoptive child”. According to the United States Census (U.S. Department of Commerce), the median income of U.S households was \$50,054 (the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile) and the mean income was \$69,677, as of 2011. In this paper, middle-class is defined as a category where the household income is between the 40<sup>th</sup> (lower limit \$38,520) and 60<sup>th</sup> (lower limit \$62,434) percentiles. However, when the interviewees categorized themselves as middle-class or upper-middle class, their own definition of the term middle class was not ignored, but rather more recognized than the statistical definition of the category.

stated or implied that they had an affluent upbringing, which enabled them to obtain a good education, afford traveling with their family, attend expensive culture camps or language camps, and enter college without the burden of paying the tuition for undergraduate education (some of them received a scholarship, but the college expenses would have been paid by their parents anyway).

Another tendency that was observed among the interviewees was that going to college was almost a “have-to.” It seemed like there was an expectation from the parents as well as the interviewees that they would attend college without any doubt. Even though going to college had a lot to do with the interviewees’ personal goals and choices, parental emphasis on obtaining a good education was also influential when the interviewees made the decision to go to a university. Linda shared the choice of proceeding to entering college was not really a “choice” per se, explaining how her family’s socioeconomic class influenced her education-related decisions. Below is the excerpt from the interview with her:

I guess just the fact that both of my parents have master’s degrees and value education. Like it wasn’t really – um, it wasn’t really like a choice whether I was going to college or not. Like, it was just an assumption. Like, growing up I’ve never thought like “Will I go to college?” like, it was *when* and *where* [emphasis added] I would go to college... I think my parents wanted me to find the school that fits me the best or whatever. Um, and same for graduate school. Like, I mean I got scholarships for both undergrad, like, merit-based scholarship for undergrad and graduate school, but I think even if I had it, my parents could have afforded it to send me.



Sally and Lyn also described parental support for their education:

Sally: My parents would tell me that, like, I would go to college and they would pay for my undergrad. So they would always tell me “Don’t worry about your undergrad, because we’ve planned to send you to undergrad.”... I didn’t worry about money really and college and everything like some of my friends, and they (her parents) would tell me like, “Oh, it’s okay, you don’t need to work. Everyone needs to focus on school”.

Lyn: My parents always put an emphasis on education, like, if they felt I needed to go to a private school when I was younger, they would’ve sent me there, you know, like the pretty good education system and everything. Yeah, I mean I feel like they always put, yeah, my education first.

Separately from the affordability of the parents for his education, David also implied that he has not felt limited with his upbringing, sharing experiences of travelling with his parents:

... We traveled a lot. My parents took me to different countries when I was younger. We didn’t get to go so much when I was in high school ‘cause I was too busy. But we would go to Europe. We went to Asia. Went to the Caribbean and stuff. I had a lot of exposure to other cultures and I was always very interested in that somehow.

Their class identity has been quite stable through their lives and it can be concluded that the affordability and emphasis on education from their parents were influential for them to continue to college. With the interviewees’ personal motivations added, it seems that the two factors, parental support and personal goals, brought synergy.

Nevertheless, a number of questions arise. Would the interviewees' pursuit of post-graduate education have been a possible option if they had not been well supported by their parents for their secondary and undergraduate education? Can pursuing post-baccalaureate education be seen as a continuation from college, and is the transition not easier if their undergraduate education was greatly supported by their parents? And all of these might revolve in which class an individual falls and how it influences their decisions.

#### 4. Factors Influenced Their Decision to Pursue Post-Graduate Education

Even though the financial affordability was partly influential for obtaining undergraduate education, it does not seem that it really determined the next step the interviewees would have taken. For their pursuit of graduate education, there seemed to be other factors, such as economic situation and job market, personal goals, experiences, parents' education achievements, and environments where they grew up. The factors that influenced the interviewees' decision to pursue post-graduate education are organized into five categories below.

##### 1) Personal Goals

Their personal goals were significant when the interviewees made the decision to go to graduate or professional school. Even though the decision that they made was influenced by other factors as well, such as their upbringing and the education levels of their parents, it seemed that the final decision greatly involved the interviewees' own goals for their lives. David's goal has been always firm and steady since he was in

elementary school, which enabled him to apply for medical school without major hesitation. Here is an excerpt of the interview with David.

Interviewer: When did you first think you wanted to go to medical school?

David: Uh, yeah. I was in first grade ((chuckles)).

Interviewer: First grade.

David: Yeah, I was in first grade. It hasn't changed like all grades through like middle school and high school, or college.

Interviewer: Nice. What was the reason?

David: I don't know. I thought it would be fun. I really liked science when I was a little kid. I continued to science and, like, to biochemistry, um, in college... I knew what I wanted to do. And I knew to get there would be go to college, apply to medical school to do that. Um, I think it was just like part of the process, so it wasn't really a question whether I would go. It was just like – where.

Sally also emphasized her independent decision-making process for her pursuit of post-graduate education. Although both of her parents have obtained post-baccalaureate education and they have high expectations for her, Sally's decision to go to graduate school was more on her own. She described how she decided for the next step after college:

I have told them, like, "Oh, here's what I'm going to do", but I don't, like, ask for their advice really, I would just say like "this is what I'm doing". So for example, when I was

applying to grad school, I just sort of did that own my own, like I researched schools on my own, and then once I was done, like sent in my application, then I told them “Oh, I applied here, here, here..” So I didn’t really get their input about it. ((chuckles))... And I think I realized that for me to do well, it would be smart to get my master’s. So, but it’s not like they told me to do it, it’s more of just me thinking like –they want what’s best for me and I think what’s best for me is going back to school.

Ellen also explained how her personal goal was important when making the decision to go to graduate school.

I’ve always wanted go towards my Ph.D. actually. It’s just kind of a goal that I wanted because I was thinking about teaching. And I knew that I didn’t want to do, um, primary education I knew I wanted higher education. And so that’s why I went to explore teach in high school. But I think I’d wanna teach more in college setting, so that’s why I wanted to keep pursuing higher education. So I think I still am gonna try to go for a Ph.D.

## 2) Education Achievement of Parents

Their parents’ education levels seem to be a factor that made some interviewees decide to apply for graduate school. The parents of four interviewees completed post-graduation education, and the parents of the other two interviewees have finished some college work. Regardless, in either case, the parents’ educational level did influence the interviewees’ decisions to achieve post-graduate education. The commonality between the two circumstances was that both of them led the interviewees to want to go further. Although the educational levels of their parents are not the determinant for them to

pursue post-graduate education, they might have been a motivation for the interviewees to obtain education further. Both of Ellen's parents have a master's degree in education, and they care about education for their children. Revise to state: Ellen implied that the educational achievements of her parents were a motivating factor in her decision.

They've always told me they wanted me to at least get my B.A., um, that was kind of, like, a have-to. But as far as after that, my parents said depending what I wanna go into they would support me whichever way, as long as I'm going to be on a goal. So if my goal does not require an MA or PhD, then they wouldn't support me. But a lot of what I'm looking at will require that... It (her parents' education achievements) made me wanna go further than my B.A.

Linda's parents also have a master's degree, and they have always put an emphasis on education:

I think just, in general, they've always fostered an environment where I could learn success and educational achievement are important. Um, I think they always taught me that with education you can succeed in life, you can get a good job, and you can be an informed citizen or whatever, you know.

Similarly, Carol also stated the fact that both of her parents have received a post-baccalaureate degree made her obtaining college education mandatory, and consequently it led her to pursue as much education as possible.

The other circumstance is where the parents were not able to pursue higher education or finish the college work. Even though David's parents do not have a higher

degree than an associate college degree, their passion for educating him was strong; it implicitly influenced David's decision to go into medical school.

So, my mom, because she didn't finish her degree from here, um, she wanted me to go here, secretly... My mom really wanted, because she didn't finish her degree, she wanted to me to go to college for sure.

Lyn also was raised in a family whose priority for her was obtaining education. She explained how her parents focused on making sure she was able to access education.

Um, well, they were always just very supportive of my education and they always encourage me to strive to do well in school and to pursue higher education, because they didn't always have the support... I know that there have been times, I think, my parents, although they had a significant experience in their fields... there have been times even my mom has said, you know, she's suffered promotion or something because she didn't have a bachelor's degree per se, so they always said, you know, "It's so necessary to have a bachelor's degree now," I mean, to have something at least.

### 3) Personal Experiences

Personal experiences that the interviewees had through their lives outside their family, neighborhood, hometown, or United States were also included among the factors for the decision to pursue post-baccalaureate education. Their personal experiences seem to be related to all of the other factors, but narrowly, they are more interrelated with their personal goals. Sally had an experience of teaching English in Korea when she just graduated from college. She was teaching 70 to 80 undergraduate students in one of her

classes, and facilitating the class and communicating with the Korean students were challenging for her. However, that experience was one of the determinants for her decision to go back to school. Here is an excerpt from the interview with Sally.

So that was really... challenging. And, um, yeah, I just I definitely didn't really know how to, like, approach how to teach that. So I would do that differently now. But other than that, I mean, it was a, overall, very positive experience, and that's actually - teaching there is actually what made me want to go back to school... So, maybe more than my parents or my own sort of goals, um, teaching there, and sort of realizing that I wasn't doing as well as I, like, hoped, I guess? I was like, "If I really want to be a good English teacher, I need to go back to school."

Her experiences in the U.S. also have had an impact on her pursuit of master's degree.

The excerpt below summarizes it up well.

Well, I didn't always think I wanted to be a teacher. Um, it's sort of just something that I would always, like, come back to, 'cause growing up I had a lot of experience, like working with kids, either at like camps or tutoring... One day I just sort of, like, realized "Oh, this is what you like doing, so you should pursue being a teacher." So, it's kind of more of the practical stuff that sort of pushes me do a master's... I think just these days if you wanna be like a competitive candidate for, like, a school to hire you, like, obviously you need a teaching license, but it helps if you have a master's in your area.

Linda also explained the reason why she chose the specific major for graduate school, which goes back to one of her high school classes.

Um, I took ASL, American Sign Language in high school as a foreign language for my foreign language requirement. Um, and then, like I said earlier, my undergrad degree is in elementary ed. And I really like ASL, they are really, like, education, I think both of them are very important so when you combine those two you get deaf education ((laughs))...

And answering the question about her final goal in her life, Linda mentioned her experience in Korea and its impact on her post-baccalaureate education as well.

I want to help improve the deaf education system here in America. But, um, also – when I was living in Korea (in between college and graduate school) I volunteered at a deaf school in Seoul, like, once a week besides from teaching English. And I realized the deaf education system there is pretty subpar, um, and there are a lot of reasons for that. So I think – I don't know this will happen - but I was toying with the idea, like, applying for, like, sort of research grant in the future.

#### 4) Environmental factors

Being reared by the parents who were working in a specific setting, it seemed that some interviewees have found that environment comfortable and familiar. In this process, since they were younger, they have been constantly exposed to that particular setting where their parents spent a considerable amount of time or were working, and the interviewees grew up with it. David, Lyn, and Ellen were always exposed to an environment in which they can learn about it and meet people who were working in there. It seems that this exposure partly led them to think about studying in and working in a relevant field. First, the following excerpt is from the interview with David. Even though



his mother's involvement in hospital was not a determinant for his decision to go further in his education, it was definitely an enforcer.

I guess, my mom always worked in the hospital when I was growing up, so I always had contact with doctors. And that probably reinforced my goal to like, go to college and go to medical school. But in some ways, like, college is just like a stepping stone ((chuckles)), I was like "Well, I gotta do it" I have to do well but it's not what I wanted, you know, it's not what I *ultimately* [emphasis added] wanna do. Um, so I guess having that contact with doctors, I was able to do some shadowing during high school even and during college again, and having those connections were helpful. It reinforced what I wanted to go into medicine. And that definitely pushed me to pursue medicine as like my career.

Lyn also has been exposed to the hospital setting similar to what David experienced, but it had a bit different atmosphere for her family.

Um, I decided to go to medical school mostly because throughout my childhood or a lot of times, both of my parents had a lot of illnesses, and a lot of illnesses of my grandparents and everything, so I kind of grew up in the hospital setting in, um, the clinic setting, so just something as very familiar with. And, um, there was just a lot that I felt like that I could give back to patients and just from my experiences that I felt really grateful for all the health, you know, all the care that my parents received.

For the other interviewee, Ellen, the field of education was what she had always felt familiar and comfortable with because of her parents' involvement in it.

Um, it wasn't the only thing I wanted when I was young. But it was always at the back of my mind. I think probably because my parents came from education background, like, for their work. So I had gone with them to take-your-daughter-to-work day and I've gone to a lot of the events that were held at my dad's school. So I guess I always got energy from being around it. And then they seemed to really like their work. Or they felt that it was meaningful. So I just kind of – I never told them that I wanted to go into education - but that was always something that I was thinking about.

#### 5) Job Market/Economic Reasons

There were three interviewees who included economic situation in general as one of the reasons why they decided to go back to school for a master's degree. In other words, concerns, such as, how the situation of the current job market is, how much financial burden they might have, and how a master's degree will affect their job seeking process were the practical reasons that the interviewees had to consider before going to graduate school. For instance, Carol, after her short work experience right after college, realized how tight the job market in the U.S. was, and when the opportunity to go to graduate school with a full scholarship came to her, she resigned from her job which she was not happy with and go back to school. Likewise, Linda, also said the economic reason was one of the factors for her decision. In detail, she thought it could have been very difficult to find a job without a master's degree. In other words, the decision to obtain post-graduate education was her investment to have a better job in near future.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 1. Conclusions

The two goals of this current study were to explore ethnic, racial, and class identities of the six Korean adoptees and discover the factors that influenced their decision to pursue post-baccalaureate education. This study used a qualitative method, face-to-face interviews for data collection. Raised in Minnesota or near Minnesota, the interviewees had some significant commonalities in terms of their identities and factors for the decision to go to graduate or professional school.

First, they identified themselves as Korean in terms of ethnic identity, but in a different sense from what second generation Korean Americans might define themselves with. In addition, their ethnic identity is contextual; it differently appears depending on the people who they are with and place they are in. Also, parental support made it easier for them to start exploring Korean culture and searching for birth parents. Racial identities of the Korean adoptees a bit varied depending on the interviewee; however, it was shared among the interviewees that they are considered or categorized as Asian American by others. It seemed that they did not necessarily define themselves as Asian American, even though they tended to use the terms “Korean” or “Korean American” and “Asian” or “Asian American” interchangeably. The “model minority” stereotype related to the image of Asian American was negatively viewed by the interviewees. Lastly, regarding class identity, the interviewees stated that they are all from a middle-class or

upper-middle class household and did not feel limited growing up in terms of parental support for their education. There was a sense of belongingness in the category of middle or upper-middle class among them. Moreover, there was an expectation or a “have-to” from their parents that they had to go to college at least, and education was the all-time emphasis in their family. They were all supported financially for their undergraduate study, either partially or entirely.

The factors that influenced the interviewees’ decision to proceed to graduate-level education can be organized into these five categories: 1) Personal Goals, 2) Education Achievements of Parents, 3) Personal Experiences, 4) Environmental factors, and 5) Job Market/Economic Reasons.

## 2. Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The limitation for this study is that the size of the sample was small. Even though it had strengths: the researcher was able to focus on their interviews more personally and each individual was paid more attention to; a lot of commonalities were found. However, there is a possibility that the sample for the current study might be biased due to the method of recruitment for interviewees. One characteristic of the snowball sampling method is that a previous participant recommends another interviewee, and most of the time, the individual is likely to be a close friend or acquaintance of the interviewee.

However, this study still has implications for future research. The interviewees were all from Minnesota or near Minnesota. It would be an interesting comparison if future research about Korean adoptees in higher education focuses on Korean adoptees in

a different state or states. Also, increasing the size of the sample may be academically significant, if researchers can cooperate with the local adoption agencies and utilize the network for Korean adoptees. If this can be possible, a quantitative research will be possible as well in order to explore the identities of Korean adoptees and factors for their education-related decisions, and compare it with a sample in Minnesota.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



October 22, 2012

Dear Wayne Allen, Dr.:

Re: IRB Proposal entitled "[383949-3] Racial/Ethnic and Class Identities of Korean Adoptees in Higher Education in Minnesota"  
Review Level: Level I

Your IRB Proposal has been approved as of October 22, 2012. On behalf of the Minnesota State University, I wish you success with your study. Remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study. Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcome, you are required to report them to the IRB as soon as possible.

The approval of your study is for one calendar year less a day from the approval date. When you complete your data collection or should you discontinue your study, you must notify the IRB. Please include your log number with any correspondence with the IRB.

This approval is considered final when the full IRB approves the monthly decisions and active log. The IRB reserves the right to review each study as part of its continuing review process. Continuing reviews are usually scheduled. However, under some conditions the IRB may choose not to announce a continuing review. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [irb@mnsu.edu](mailto:irb@mnsu.edu) or 507-389-5102.

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for maintaining consents in a secure location at MSU for 3 years. If the PI leaves MSU before the end of the 3-year timeline, he/she is responsible for following "Consent Form Maintenance" procedures posted online.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Hadley".

Mary Hadley, Ph.D.  
IRB Coordinator

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Sifers".

Sarah Sifers, Ph.D.  
IRB Co-Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Auger".

Richard Auger, Ph.D.  
IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University's records.

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

## **Racial, Ethnic and Class Identities of Korean Adoptees in Higher Education in Minnesota**

This research will explore possible relationships between the identities of Korean adoptees that are currently in or have graduated from graduate school or professional school and their influences on the adoptees' education achievements. An interview guide consisting of 25 questions will be used to collect data from the Korean adoptee individuals who consented to participate. Data from each individual will be obtained through a one-to-one interview. An interview session will take about two hours.

### Informed consent

**You are invited to voluntarily participate in this study, and you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Therefore, your decision not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researchers or the host university whereat she is studying. By signing this consent form and participating in an interview, you are implying your consent. Thanks for your voluntary participation in the interview and the study.**

### Risks and benefits

The risks of this study are minimal to the participant. There are no immediate benefits to the participant other than reading the findings of the study when it is completed; however, there is the possibility that adoptees in the future, as well as student communities on college campuses, will benefit from the findings of this study.

### Compensation

Subjects will not receive any compensation.

### Confidentiality

During the interviews, if any interviewee wants the researcher to omit or remove a specific part of conversation, it will be respected that and removed. If they want, voice-recording will be stopped as well. After interviewing, each interviewee will be referred to with a pseudonym in the transcriptions, as well as in my thesis paper so that other readers cannot identify who the interviewees are. Nayoung Heo will transcribe the voice-recorded data from each interview using her personal computer, and this will happen in her own apartment using earphones. During this process, the computer and the data will be used in her place only. After finishing the project completely, both voice-recorded data and transcribed data will be removed completely from the computer for interviewees' privacy and confidentiality.

I have read this page.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

### Security

Consent forms will be stored by the Principal Investigator in his office at Minnesota State University for three years.

### Termination

The participants may discontinue participation at any time up to the completion of data collection without penalty or loss of benefits, emailing or calling Dr. Wayne E. Allen or Nayoung Heo.

### Contact information

The IRB Administrator Barry Ries can answer your questions about subjects' rights. Please feel free to contact the office via email: [barry.ries@mnsu.edu](mailto:barry.ries@mnsu.edu) or par telephone at: 1-(507)389-1242.

If interested in the results of the study, please contact:

Dr. Wayne E. Allen via email: [wayne.allen@mnsu.edu](mailto:wayne.allen@mnsu.edu) or par telephone at 507-389-5013

Nayoung Heo via email: [na-young.heo@mnsu.edu](mailto:na-young.heo@mnsu.edu) or par telephone at 1-507-389-5458.

### Signature

My signature indicates that I consent to participate in this research, that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have been given the opportunity to have all my questions answered, that I have been given a copy of this consent for my records and that I agree the interview may be audio-recorded.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX C

### Interview Schedule

**Section I: Education**

1. What is the highest degree you have achieved?
2. What was your major for your undergraduate study and what is your field of study in graduate (professional) school? And why did you choose to major in those?
3. What is the highest degree your parent(s) received?
4. What is the highest degree your siblings achieved if you have any?
5. What is your final goal in your education? Why is that?
6. How do you think your parent(s)' and siblings' education achievements influenced your decisions about, and commitment to, education?

**Section II: Adoption background**

7. How old are you?
8. How old were you at the time of adoption?
9. Which organization did you go through (a private agency, church, etc.)?
10. How old were your parents when they adopted you?
11. Do you have any siblings? If so, how many? And are they your biological or adoptive siblings? Which ethnicities or races would you identify them with?

**Section III: Economic background**

12. Do you think you have received adequate parental financial support for your education while growing up? Could you tell me more details in terms of your parents' support for your post-secondary and graduate education?
13. Could you pick in which class your parent(s) might fall - upper, upper-middle, middle, lower middle, or lower class - or could you give me a salary range of your parents? What is the reason?
14. Would you describe your neighborhood where you grew up? How about in terms of ethnic diversity?
15. With which socioeconomic class do you associate yourself most of the time? Has the socioeconomic class you think you are in changed at all during your life? If so, upward or downward? And how has this affected you?
16. How do you think your socioeconomic class influenced your education-related decisions?

**Section IV: Socialization**

17. In terms of ethnicity and race, were your friends from diverse or mostly homogeneous backgrounds up to and through high school? How about when you were younger?

18. In terms of class, how would you describe your neighborhood?
19. How do you think your peers viewed you in terms of race or ethnicity while growing up?
20. How did you get along with your friends? Did you feel well-accepted among peers?
21. Do you remember any prejudice, discrimination, or racism-related experiences that you had while growing up? If you do, did it influence you in any way when socializing with peers?

### **Section V: Identities**

22. A racial identity, such as Asian, African, Caucasian, and Hispanic/Latino is more about physical features, and ethnic identity involves explaining of cultural involvement in activities of a specific ethnicity. Then, with which race and/or ethnicity do you associate yourself most comfortably? Reasons?
23. How do you consider yourself in terms of ethnicity?
24. Has your racial and/or ethnic identity(s) changed in any way after entering college? If so, how?
25. Overall, what are the most significant factors that influenced the establishment of your identity? And how would you define your identity in your own words?
26. Are there aspects of your identity that you we have not discussed that are important to you? If so, what are they? And why?
27. How did they influence your decision to pursue a graduate degree?

Thank you for your participation!