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# A Qualitative Study of the Lived Experiences of Adults with African American and Korean Heritages

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADULTS  
WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN AND KOREAN HERITAGES

by

Elizabeth Sue Bradshaw

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
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Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology  
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Western Michigan University  
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# A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADULTS WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN AND KOREAN HERITAGES

Elizabeth Sue Bradshaw, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2011

Scholarship on biracial persons has been primarily focused on those of African American and White heritages. The dominance of research on this one segment of the biracial population has in turn led to the myth of a universal biracial experience. There is a critical need to hear the voices and experiences of those who are members of two or more communities of color. While many researchers have recommended that more studies be done with biracial participants from two or more communities of color, few studies have been conducted. The purpose of this study was to explore exclusively the lived experiences of adults with African American and Korean heritages (AAKs). This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach.

Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted with six female and one male AAK who all had Korean immigrant mothers and African American fathers who served in the military. Ethnographic interviews loosely structured around ten life domains were used to gain a holistic view of the participants' lived experiences. Following phenomenological data analysis, five essential themes emerged: (1) negotiation of racial identity (ies), (2) absence of AAK communal group, (3) lived experiences as othered "other," (4) reflections of Korean cultural influences, and (5) relationships with African American partners. Contextual frames for each essential theme are also discussed to

allow for deeper insight. Some of these contextual frames include: encounters with race and racism, military life, there is something about being black and Asian, and significance of traditional food. Due to the current study being the first to focus exclusively on AAKs, study results add important contributions to clinical and future research implications. One primary implication for clinical practice and training is for clinicians to be aware of their own biases and assumptions about how members of the African American and Korean communities may or may not interact. Suggestions for future research include exploration of the lived experiences of AAKs in South Korea and further study of AAK males.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation would not have been possible without the willingness of the seven adults with African American and Korean heritages that allowed me to be a witness to their lived experiences. Thank you for welcoming me into your lives and, most importantly, trusting me with your stories. I dedicate this dissertation to all seven of you.

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## Acknowledgments—Continued

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Race is not something one is, but rather an elaborate, lived experience and cultural ritual of what one *does*.” (Brunsma, 2006, p. 5)

A few years ago I went into a local Korean store looking for kimchee. The two owners were following me around the store, and when I asked a question about whether they had any turnip kimchee, I got a curt “no” and a look like “what the hell are you doing in here anyway?” I was just another suspicious African American in their eyes and it hurt. I vividly remember working at my first job as a cashier at the local downtown drugstore. I was 16 and there were two African American men talking and looking at me from the aisle next to my register. One of them came up to me and said that they had a bet going; one of them was betting money that I was Black, and the other one was betting money that I wasn’t.

Rockquemore (2004) stated, “It is in the supermarkets, gas stations, and front yards of America that individuals interact with one another and where their racial identities are instantaneously determined based on a longstanding schema of mutually exclusive categorization” (p. 136). The previous examples from my personal journey as a woman of African American and Korean descent (AAK) give voice to these day-to-day interactions. These examples of contact with people in various environments illustrate the

kinds of issues that have been documented in the literature examining the lives of mixed race individuals.

Contemporary research on biracial individuals has had a short history. While one can trace back earlier writings to Stonequist's (1937) marginal man theory of identity development for biracial individuals that posits that mixed race equates to a life of confusion and pathology, it was not until the early 1980s and 90s that a new era of non-pathological work began. This more balanced view of mixed race individuals was ushered in by authors and researchers who were also members of the biracial population. While many of these biracial authors were focused on individuals from a myriad of different racial backgrounds, the experiences of those who encompass African American and White heritages have consistently been the main focus of study.

The dominance of research on this one segment of the biracial population has in turn led to the myth of a universal biracial experience, so much so that as Adler (2004) stated, "The term 'biracial' has been most associated with Black-White racial mixes, and has reiterated the dichotomous political position that race relations hold in the United States, placing Whites in the dominant position" (p. 96). This has resulted in the silencing of the voices and experiences of those who are members of two or more communities of color, including AAKs. While many researchers recommend that more studies be done with biracial participants from two or more communities of color, not many of these studies have been produced.

African Americans and Asians have gone from historically being lumped into one category, that of non-White, and treated accordingly, to that of present-day America in which "today's ethnic minorities are encouraged to jockey for a favored position and



access to dominant Whites at the expense of positive and cooperative relations with other ethnic minorities” (McFerson, 2006, p. 5). Kim and Lee (2001) suggested while both African Americans and Asians have experiences with discrimination, they do not “readily identify with each other or perceive strong common interests” (p. 633). This phenomenon can specifically be seen in the case of relations between African Americans and Koreans.

U.S. military occupation in South Korea and the riots in Los Angeles and New York are the two most portrayed scenarios in which African Americans and Koreans are said to cross paths. According to Yu (1991), Korean wives of U.S. military men stationed in Korea constituted a large group of Korean immigrants around the time of the Korean War and were subsequently nicknamed war brides. These women endured discrimination from U.S. Americans and Koreans that indicated a negative bias toward intermarriage. Media images of African Americans looting Korean-owned stores in both Los Angeles and New York in the 1990s have provided the most dominant stereotypical scenario in which these two communities are said to interact. With so much focus on the tumultuous relationships between African Americans and Koreans, where are the voices of those who live in a world that involves intimate knowledge of both of these cultures? Where are the stories of adults of African American and Korean heritage?

With any discussion of mixed race individuals, one must examine the most controversial act of cross race relations there is—that of romantic interracial relationships. Thornton (1996) explained that the presence of interracial couples “encapsulate[s] all our unresolved feeling about race” (p. 107). The one topic of concern for many in opposition to interracial coupling is that of mixed-race children. Root (1998) posited that the question “What of the children?” asked to interracial couples illuminates

an underlying assumption that a child of perceived mixed racial blood is problematic. Overwhelmingly, research has proven that being biracial does not predispose individuals for psychological maladjustment or pathology (Gillem, Lincoln, & English, 2007).

Participants who encompass Asian and White heritages dominate the discourse on mixed-race Asians as a whole, with those that have Japanese heritage having been the most studied (Root, 1998). Standen (1996) conducted the first and only study to date exclusively on biracial Korean Americans. The study examined the negotiation of racial identity for eight Korean and White participants. Specifically, Standen isolated the social contexts of family, peer group, and larger society for study. Standen found that racial identity was fluid for the participants and was situational at times. For example, some of the participants described seeing themselves as Korean more prominently when around other Koreans.

Standen (1996) also discussed the importance in understanding that there is no singular biracial experience and specifically stated, “Just as a Japanese individual would not accurately be termed Chinese, so it may be that a biracial Korean is not accurately termed a biracial African American or even a biracial Japanese American” (pp. 246-247). While I agree with the notion that there is no singular biracial experience, Standen’s statement that a biracial Korean cannot also identify as a biracial African American is not necessarily the case for AAKs. It is quite possible that an AAK would consider himself or herself a biracial Korean and/or a biracial African American. It is these types of issues that warranted a study on the inner worlds of AAKs, and no study to date had explored this group exclusively.

Thornton and Gates (2001) described the literature on multiracial Asians with an African American heritage as having “lagged behind other work on multiethnic Asian Americans” (p. 94). Thornton (1983) and Hall (1980) were the first two research studies to exclusively explore the lives of those who have both African American and Asian (Afroasian) heritages, specifically Black Japanese Americans, coined BJAs by Thornton. Since these two landmark studies, BJAs have been the most studied group within the small body of work on Afroasians.

Williams and Thornton (1998) conducted a qualitative exploration of the lived racial experiences of a sample of 27 Afroasians living in various locales. Two participants self-identified as having African American and Korean heritage. The authors chose to directly quote one of the AAK participants in their finding that 18 out of the 27 participants described their biracial identity as an asset versus a liability. The participant stated,

Everyone tells me how awful it must be to be Korean and Black during these times of racial tension. . . . Blacks and Koreans are more alike than people might think, but only someone who can be inside those communities can know that. (p. 261)

It is this insider’s view that this study sought to explore. What did AAKs have to say about their lived experiences?

There has been almost no mention of AAKs in popular culture until 2006 when Hines Ward, wide receiver for the Pittsburgh Steelers and Super Bowl MVP, went to South Korea for the first time since his birth. The hoopla in both the U.S. and South Korean media over this pilgrimage by an African American and Korean man was quite telling of the perceived novelty of his mixed heritage. Similar to popular culture, what has

been sporadically seen in academic literature is the theorizing of the tenuous life that AAKs may experience due to being a part of two cultures that have been in conflict.

Hershel (1995) theorized that “the greater the historical segregation of racial groups, the greater the person’s exclusion, as in black-Asian ancestry” (p. 176).

We continue to have very little insight into the concerns of AAKs, the challenges they face, and how they go about meeting these challenges. The presumed universality of the biracial experience has portrayed mixed-race individuals as a monolithic group. When we look at biracial individuals with this lens, what are we missing? Rarely have the lives of AAKs been studied in sufficient depth to obtain a broad understanding of the patterns of meaning that lie behind their life experiences.

In this investigation, I aimed to study the inner worlds of a small group of AAKs. One goal I had in this investigation was to have the meaning we make of the experiences of AAKs be informed as much as possible by the way the AAKs themselves understood their experiences.

### Research Questions

1. How does a small group of AAK adults living in the U.S. go about making their way through life?
2. What issues arise for these AAK adults?
3. How do they face the challenging situations they meet?
4. What suggestions do they have for other AAK individuals and those encountering them?

The remainder of this dissertation is organized in the following manner. Chapter II deals with relevant research within which this investigation is situated. Chapter III describes the methodological approach and my personal stance. The study's findings are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V provides further discussion of the results by situating them within existing scholarship. Clinical implications and suggestions for future research are also discussed in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

More than 60 years after desegregation and during this time of record number of immigrants entering into the U.S., there are still imaginary lines that separate racial groups. Those that venture to cross these lines, especially in interracial romantic relationships, are often met with scrutiny and opposition. The implicit and explicit rules for racial group membership, coupled with taboos associated with interracial relationships, pose unique socio-political issues for those who are of mixed race. As Spencer (1999) stated, “Although more overt forms of racial oppression may have declined, obsession with color – race remains one of America’s preeminent problems” (p. 13).

The majority of research on mixed race individuals is focused primarily on those with African American and White racial heritages. While there is a growing body of work on those considered to be mixed-race Asians, those who are of White and Japanese heritage are the most studied. There had been no study to date that had exclusively examined the lived experiences of adults of African American and Korean heritage.

The meeting of African American and Korean communities often conjures up images of U.S. military occupation in South Korea or the conflicts between Korean merchants and African American customers in Los Angeles and New York. These images are those of separation between the two cultures. What are the lived experiences of

individuals who encompass both of these cultures? The purpose of this study was to explore the inner worlds of a small group of adults with African American and Korean heritage and to make meaning of their life experiences.

This literature review situates the present study in the literature on mixed-race individuals and interracial relationships. More specifically, the review examines interracial relationships in the African American and Korean communities as well as research on Eurasians (White/Asian) and Afroasians (African American/Asian). The conceptual framework of hermeneutics is also discussed.

### Definitions

Before delving into a review of the relevant literature for this study on adults with African American and Korean heritage, it is important to be clear on what is meant by the terms *biracial*, *African American*, and *Korean*. It is widely accepted that race, as we know it, is a social construction. Race as a social construction dictates that the notion of pure racial categories based on biological factors is faulty. While this logic is flawed, race as a social construction has and continues to dictate who has access to resources and how they are dispensed in this country (Helms & Cook, 1999).

#### *Biracial*

Who are we talking about when we use the term *biracial*? According to many theorists, to be biracial one must be the biological child of parents who are of two distinct races (Gillem et al., 2007; Root, 1992). This description is often under the guise of social construction. Spencer (1999) stated that “even the assertion of race as a so-called social

reality is no more than the evocation of biological race in a disguised form” (p. 89).

Although this is given as a rationale for studying mixed race individuals, what are the implications of studying this population in this way and are there other ways of looking at mixed race? In this section, I will provide a brief history of biracial literature and the lens that the present study employed.

To talk about mixed race there must be a discussion of the history of racial categorization in the United States. Racial classification by physical features such as lips, hair texture, and skin color was common practice in this country, but as Guthrie (2004) stated, “Visual observations were confusing; large number of Blacks with mixed ancestry complicated the matter of identification” (p. 25). Spencer (2006) also stated, “If multiracial identity were in fact to refer to something real, Afro-Americans essentially all of them would be multiracial” (p. 4). Classifications such as mulatto, quadroon, and octoroon were used to determine how much Black and White blood a mixed-race individual supposedly had. In many ways, this archaic measure of one’s race is still being practiced today, yet the example of racial mixing within the African American population also shows how faulty this system is as well. It begs the questions, what are the issues that surround cataloging human beings this way and who benefits from these categories?

The addition of a multiracial category to the U.S. census in 2000 was an event where issues of U.S. racial categorization were highlighted. The controversy surrounding how to categorize those who were of both African American and White heritage was telling of the White/non-White dichotomy that predominates U.S. racial culture. There appeared to be two sides of the debate, one side consisting of multiracial advocates who argued that African American/White individuals all identify as multiracial and the other



side with African American community leaders who claimed that they identified as solely African American (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002). Brunnsma (2006) criticized the multiracial movement as having the belief that the major injustice is that of forced choices via the governmental racial classification system and stated that this view “misses the larger and more important links between racial identity, racial inequality and racial justice” (p. 5). Interestingly, the debate regarding the identity of those who are of African American and Asian heritage was not as hotly contested.

*Models.* Modern work with mixed-race populations has centered on models of identity and challenges to identity development. It was found that monoracial models of identity did not necessarily fit for those of mixed race. Models such as those created by Henriksen and Trusty (2004), Collins (2000), Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995), Kich (1992), and Poston (1990) posited that mixed-race individuals follow a path that moves from a colorblind mentality to identification with a singular racial group to finally identification that involves acknowledgment of all of their racial group memberships.

The recent model by Henriksen and Trusty (2004) is based on a qualitative study of seven adults of African American and White heritage. The Black/White Identity Development Model uses the term *periods* instead of stages. Henriksen and Trusty (2004) outlined six periods (neutrality, acceptance, awareness, experimentation, transition, and recognition) that “identify an individual’s movement toward the development of a racial identity” (p. 71).

The neutrality period is the time when the biracial individual is not aware that there are racial differences, and acceptance is the period in which individuals begin to see

themselves racially based on information from family and peers. The awareness period follows, where biracial individuals recognize that they are racially different from others, usually through negative interactions with others. The period of experimentation signifies a time where there is identification with one of the two racial group memberships and is influenced by situational factors. Transition found the majority of study participants in conflict with how to racially identify. This period is marked with many of the participants choosing to identify as biracial due to not feeling comfortable with identifying solely as Black or White. Finally, the recognition period is one in which persons accept that they are biracial and make a decision in how they will racially identify.

Henriksen and Trusty (2004) stressed that not all biracial individuals will experience all of the periods and that it is possible to recycle through the periods as well. It is important to acknowledge that this model evolved from a study of primarily women of African American and White heritage. This model has not been studied with individuals of African American and Asian heritages.

There have been those that have questioned the stage model of biracial identity and have proposed what has been termed as *ecological frameworks* (Gillem et al., 2007). Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) and Root (1999) aimed to highlight environmental factors that influence identity choices and stressed that no particular identity is better than another. For example, Rockquemore and Brunnsma found that appearance, social networks, and socialization were factors that influence identity development for Black/White biracial individuals.

Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) used the theory of symbolic interactionism to frame their model. Based on a study of adults identified as having Black and White

heritage, four categories of identity were developed. These categories are border, singular, protean, and transcendent. Border identity is one in which the individual does not see himself or herself as Black or White, but “incorporates both blackness and whiteness into a unique hybrid category of self-reference” (Rockquemore & Brunnsma, 2002, p. 42). Singular identity is where the biracial individual identifies as either Black or White, and protean identity consists of variability in racial identity, which can change depending on cultural contexts. Finally, transcendent identity is where individuals do not see themselves racially and feel that racial identity is not important to their understanding of self.

*Challenges.* In addition to identity models, there has been a steady stream of work focused on challenges to healthy identity development for biracial individuals. Shih and Sanchez (2005), in their review of empirical multiracial research, found several themes in regard to the challenges to multiracial identity development. These challenges included conflict between private and public definitions, justifying identity choices, forced-choice dilemmas, lack of role models, conflicting messages, and double rejection. The first theme of conflict between private and public definitions describes the phenomenon where the multiracial person has identified himself or herself in a way that is not always validated by the outside world. This phenomenon has been referred to in the literature by other terms such as *reflected appraisal* (Khanna, 2004) and *theatre of identity* (Williams, 1995).

The second theme of justifying identity choices coincides with the first theme of conflict between private and public definitions. It is the idea that multiracial people “not

only need to justify their identity choices to themselves but they must also justify their identity choices to society” (Shih & Sanchez, 2005, p. 572). Having to justify identity choices may also lead to feeling like an outsider and a lack of feeling accepted by peers, family, and society in general (Root, 1994).

The third challenge found by Shih and Sanchez is that of forced-choice dilemmas. Researchers have found that there are many social situations in which biracial persons are put in the position to choose one aspect of their racial identity over another (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Some of these situations are in the contexts of hypodescent, government forms, and physical characteristics. The rules of hypodescent dictate that persons with even “one drop of Black blood” are categorized as Black and therefore must also identify as Black. This could potentially cause challenges for those biracial persons with Black heritage if they choose to identify differently. The limited choices that those of multiple heritages have had to accurately describe their racial identity(ies) on governmental forms have been well documented. It was not until the census in the year 2000 when the choice was given to mark more than one option for race. The often described as “ambiguous” racial appearance that some biracial persons are said to possess is a potential challenge. The same can be said for biracial persons who appear stereotypically monoracial. Root (1994) stated that questions such as “What are you?” and “Where are you from?” are often the result of a racially ambiguous appearance.

Lack of role models is the fourth challenge in which the mixed-race individual is not in contact with others that are like them and do not have models of how to negotiate the systems of racial identification. Shih and Sanchez (2005) found that this challenge may be most important during late childhood and adolescence when biracial persons like

most children at this age are looking for examples of “where to fit in, to help learn what is expected of them, and to guide them in understanding others’ behavior toward them” (p. 572). What can also be difficult for those with multiple heritages is that their caregivers may not fully understand how to help them navigate this important developmental process since, in many cases, they themselves are not biracial.

Conflicting messages and double rejection are the fifth and sixth challenges. Shih and Sanchez (2005) discussed the conflicting messages that are given to multiracial children from their primary caregivers and society at large. The issue of the importance of the family context in the racial identity of multiracial individuals has been one of interest. Jourdan (2006) conducted a qualitative study of five multiracial college students in order to examine how they perceived their ethnic identity development. The research found that family environment played a key role in this developmental process. Jourdan stated that “these interactions within their family also influenced the participants’ ability to interact with people outside of their family, and had an impact on their adjustment to the college environment” (p. 332).

Wallace (2001) found in her sample of 15 high school and college students that how parents felt toward their own ethnic identity shaped how the biracial student made meaning of ethnic group membership. Shih and Sanchez (2005) pointed out that many caregivers within multiracial families often downplay the importance of race, therefore creating a situation where multiracial children and adolescents often learn of racial conflict out in the community.

Double-rejection refers to the problem that many multiracial individuals face in that they are often not accepted in any of the communities that they may feel a part of.

Shih and Sanchez (2005) stated, “As a result of this double rejection, multiracial individuals receive many messages from society about who they are not but few messages about who they are” (p. 573). This coincides with what Root (1992) theorized about the issues of acceptance and belonging for multiracial individuals. Root stated, “Many mixed-race people grow up with countless experiences that illogically and unnecessarily set them apart from others” (p. 465).

After reviewing current biracial research and its criticisms, some have asked, how does one research mixed race and not contribute to the status quo of racial categorization and where does the field go from here? Spencer (1999) offered the following suggestion: “The answer lies in challenging rather than acceding to the hegemony of race and in rejecting the premise that personal identity need be race based to begin with” (p. 89). It is this holistic view that was used to frame the current investigation. This study sought to explore the lived experiences of adults with African American and Korean heritages in all that it entails and allowed for the participants’ various dimensions of humanity to emerge.

### *African Americans*

While many researchers use the terms *African American* and *Black* interchangeably, I will be using the term *African American* to identify the group of U.S. Americans descended from people of the African Diaspora (Jenkins, 1995). Cross (1991) stated that “there is no one way to be Black” (p. 149); this statement speaks to the within group diversity that exists in the African American community. Unfortunately, this diversity is not always recognized in discussions focused on African Americans. The idea that African Americans are seen as a homogenous group speaks to the lack of humanity

given to this diverse population. This lack of humanity can be seen in Johnson's (2006) discussion of the impact of negative images of African American men in the media. Johnson stated, "How one thinks about African American men affects the way one responds to them" (p. 187).

Similarly, images of African American women have fared no better. Adkison-Bradley and Sanders (2007) found in their review of counseling literature that the majority of research studies on African American women compared them to White women and contributed to a deficit perspective. This perspective often described African American women in regard to drug use, poverty, and as mothers of children out of wedlock.

Helms and Cook (1999) outlined five themes of struggles that African Americans have faced and continue to struggle against. These themes are access to education, political enfranchisement, economic and employment inequities, equal access to public accommodations and institutions, and victimization and reactions to violence. While it is important to discuss the dehumanization of African Americans via slavery and racism, it is equally important to view this community from a humanistic perspective that allows for the discussion of agency. As Jenkins (1995) explained, "Many African Americans have managed to use their creative human capacities in modest or striking and socially contributive ways to resist being dehumanized" (p. 21).

### *Korean Americans*

The terms *Korean* and *Korean American* will be used interchangeably in this literature view. This is done with the acknowledgment that there are differences in regard

to issues of acculturation for the individual who was born and raised in Korea and is often a first generation immigrant to the U.S. versus individuals of Korean heritage who have been born and raised in the U.S. When appropriate, these differences will be discussed.

The migration of many Koreans to the U.S. can be categorized in three distinct waves (Gudykunst, 2001). The first wave brought small groups of political exiles and immigrants who went to Hawaii to work in sugar fields. The second came at the end of the Korean War and included wives of U.S. soldiers, adoptees, and students. The third and largest wave occurred after the 1965 Immigration Act and many of these Koreans moved to major cities and set up their own large communities.

Confucianism has heavily influenced Korean culture, in particular its views on family and the importance of group orientation and collectivism (Chang, 2007).

Confucius was a Chinese philosopher who established both a religion and social philosophy to structure society (E. Kim, 1998). Confucianism dictates a system based on patriarchy (S. C. Kim, 1997) and emphasizes clear role differentials for husbands, wives, and children. Due to the pattern of Korean immigration where many recent immigrants have come to stay with family members already here, the cultural values of Korea have been extended here in the U.S.

It has been found that many Korean Americans, regardless of time in the U.S., tend to maintain a high level of Korean ethnic identity (Chang, 2007). Maintenance of this strong Korean ethnic identity entails primarily socializing with other Koreans and passing down Korean traditions to children. The importance of Korean churches both socially and culturally for many Korean Americans is an example of this strong sense of Korean ethnic identity. While only 30% of Koreans living in South Korea identify as



Christian, almost 70% of Korean Americans identify as Christian (Parrillo, 2003).

Churches serve as places for many Korean Americans to have a communal bond with others in their ethnic group (Parrillo, 2003).

This brief exploration of aspects pertaining to biracial, African American, and Korean communities in America is by no means meant to be exhaustive. It is intended to serve as a foundation for a discussion on individuals of both African American and Korean heritage. Before discussing these particular mixed-race individuals, it is important to examine the literature on interracial relationships.

### Interracial Relationships

Thirty-eight states had anti-miscegenation laws at one time, banning interracial marriage and sexual relations (Moran, 2001). Anti-miscegenation laws specifically targeted African Americans and Asians due to their supposed dominant biological features. Moran (2001) described that for African Americans, anti-miscegenation laws were enacted to further marginalize them as inhuman and to signify being “marked with the taint of slavery and inferiority, even after they were nominally free” (p. 17). By regulating intimacy between Whites and Asians, the U.S. made it clear that it saw Asians as “foreigners” (Moran, 2001, p. 18) and wanted to make sure that Asian males were unable to bear children with White women who would be U.S. citizens. It is clear that anti-miscegenation laws were concerned with protecting White privilege and the falsehood of a pure White race. The last anti-miscegenation laws in the U.S. were repealed in 1967. Although it has been more than 40 years since interracial relationships were deemed a criminal act, research has shown that there is still a negative bias towards

these unions (Miller, Olson, & Fazio, 2004). This negative bias is often justified by the creation of biracial children.

For the purposes of this literature review, mixed-race children will be briefly discussed and specific attention will then be paid to interracial relationships in both the African American and Korean communities.

### *Mixed-Race Children*

A question heard by many interracial couples is “What about your children?” As mentioned above, for many families and communities there is the belief that the birth of monoracial children helps to ensure the survival of that particular race or ethnicity. Root (2001b) highlighted five issues that the birth of mixed-race children can introduce to the interracial relationship: a permanent record of the interracial relationship, different-race blood kin; a potential change in some people’s perception of a parent’s race, potential changes in the race proportions and cultural mores within a family, and provocation of reflection on racial socialization.

The issues of biracial children being a permanent record of interracial relations and the creation of blood kin all point to the issue that these children are “undeniable proof” (Root, 2001b, p. 138) of an interracial union. This can be a situation in which a family may cut off the couple and the child out of embarrassment or can be an agent of change that helps to bring family members closer for the sake of the child (Root, 2001b). Children may also legitimize the interracial relationship in the eyes of many who may have believed that the relationship was purely out of curiosity. Root (2001b) reported as one of her findings from her study of interracial couples that White women were more

concerned by how their biracial children provoked questions of their race by strangers, whereas the women of color in the sample were more concerned about whether their children would be accepted in their particular racial and/or ethnic group.

The last two issues of change in cultural mores in families and provocation of reflection on social socialization are closely linked. The birth of mixed-race children may cause family members to rethink how they construct race and may cause some parents to wonder about how their children may be different from them in racial worldview.

### *African American Interracial Relationships*

Interracial relationships are a social and political issue within the African American community. Given the history of slavery and anti-miscegenation laws in the U.S., the fear of interracial intimacy with African Americans and in particular with Whites has been a major cause of discrimination toward African Americans as a group (Chito Childs, 2005). This history of discrimination and mistreatment has fostered collectivism amongst members of the African American community and interracial relationships can often be seen as disloyalty.

*Rates.* Quian and Lichter (2007) used census data from both 1990 and 2000 to examine heterosexual intermarriage between who they described as non-Hispanic Whites, African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians, and Hispanics. They found that African Americans were least likely to marry Whites, behind American Indians and Asian Americans. African American males were more likely to marry Whites (increase from 8.3% in 1990 to 14.9% in 2000) than African American women, whose rates rose from

3.3 % to 5.3% from 1990 to 2000. The researchers found from their data that African Americans were “least likely” (p. 87) to marry other minorities but did mention that their rates of intermarriage with Latinos and Asians doubled in the 1990s.

Quian and Lichter (2007) offered the hypothesis of continued racial group segregation between African American and Whites as a reason for the low interracial marriage rates for African Americans, whereas the high rate of intermarriage between Whites and other racial groups signifies weaker racial group boundaries. Quian and Lichter stated, “These results speak clearly (and perhaps critically) to classic assimilation theory by re-emphasizing the fact that race/ethnicity and color, especially the divide between African Americans and others, represent a strong and persistent barrier to racial mixing in romance and marriage” (p. 92).

*Attitudes.* Jacobson and Johnson (2006) used data from a survey assessing attitudes towards interracial marriage given by the *New York Times* (“New York Times Race Poll,” 2000). Jacobson and Johnson analyzed specifically the attitudes of the 353 male and 581 female African American adults included in the overall sample. The authors found that 85% of the sample approved of interracial marriage. This approval appeared to correlate with increased interracial contact, interracial friendships, and demographic factors including age, educational level, and socio-economic status.

One can see from current rates of interracial marriage that African American women have rates lower than their non-African American female counterparts as well as compared to African American men. There is a concern amongst many African American women that there is a shortage of “good” African American male partners due to high

rates of incarceration, low educational attainment, and those that identify as gay. The other concern is the perception that African American men who are deemed marriage material tend to marry outside of the African American race. These issues have caused tension within the African American community in regard to interracial relationships specifically between African American males and non-African American female partners.

Chito Childs (2005) studied the attitudes of college-aged African American women toward African American and White heterosexual relationships. All of the African American female college students in this study found interracial relationships to be problematic. This belief was found to have several underlying themes: family, community, and racism. Many of the participants expressed that their families and community members would not approve of an interracial relationship. Specifically, they cited the survival of the African American community as a reason that they opposed interracial relationships. Interestingly, some of the women were more accepting of African American women dating White men, citing that an African American woman in an interracial relationship would not abandon the community.

The majority of research on interracial relationships involving African Americans centers on those involved with White partners, which does not give much insight into the dynamics involved with relationships with partners of other races. Craig-Henderson (2006) interviewed a group of African American men involved in interracial relationships. While the majority of the men were in relationships with White women, 8 out of the 25 were involved with Asians or Latinas. The themes that occurred with the 4 men in relationships with Asian women were that they attributed problems in the relationship to cultural differences and that people's attitudes toward their relationship

stemmed from their partner's perceived racial status. It was not made clear by Craig-Henderson what exactly was meant by "racial status." Is it that Asian is seen as being above African American in the racial hierarchy, or is it about perceived nationality? Interestingly, the men involved with women of Latina descent reported very few negative reactions from strangers but reported some issues with reactions from Latino males. A possible explanation for this is that African Americans and Latinos are often seen as occupying similar lower social statuses within the American racial hierarchy, so that being seen as a couple is not as much of an issue for society as a whole.

*Children.* There is a history of the inclusion of mixed-race African American children within the African American community. Rules of hypodescent have dictated that anyone with any amount of African American heritage is considered to be a sole member of that group. This practice can be traced back to slavery, where offspring of White male slave owners and Black female slaves were "denied any separate social recognition" (Smedley, 1999, p. 138) for their mixed race. These children were seen as slaves and "not permitted by law or custom to be liberated, to be acknowledged by their fathers, or to be claimed as their heirs" (Smedley, 1999, p. 138).

Craig-Henderson (2006) asked African American men involved in interracial relationships specifically about their views on biracial children. Several men expressed concern about their child's developing racial identity. One father detailed observing his son's racial choices in dating to see with whom he identified. Other participants saw mixed-race children as hope for a future in which interracial relationships would be more acceptable and subsequently a time with decreased racism.

Roth (2005) used data from the 1990 and 2000 census to examine how mixed-race African American children were racially identified by their parents. It is important to note that the researcher focused mainly on children who were of African American and White heritage. Roth found that the higher the parental educational level, the more likely they were to opt for a biracial identity for their child. Another finding was that an African American identity was seen more with children in their adolescence. Roth hypothesized that this may be due to the adolescent having adapted to society's interpretation of them as African American. Lastly, racial identity reported was also influenced by the race of the head of the household. For example, if the head of the household was an African American mother, then she was more likely to identify her child as African American. A White father as head of household was more likely to yield a White identity classification than with a White mother.

#### *Korean American Interracial Relationships*

While interracial marriage in many Asian American communities was once almost unheard of, it has become a reality for many of these communities (Crohn, 1997). Given the strong cultural ties shared by many Korean Americans in the U.S., the issue of interracial relationships is often a source of controversy.

*Rates.* Le (2007) used data from the 2000 census to analyze the rates of Asian intermarriage with Whites and between Asian ethnicities, which the author termed *pan-Asian*. The specific ethnicities studied were Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, and Korean. Le (2007) explained that he excluded Japanese Americans because the

majority of them are of third and fourth generations, which is different from the five Asian ethnicities studied, and meaningful comparisons would have been difficult.

Le (2007) found that Asian women as a whole were more likely to intermarry than men as well as be married to Whites and African Americans. Asian men were more likely to marry pan-Asian. Specifically, Chinese and Vietnamese men and women had the highest rates of marrying pan-Asian, with Vietnamese men having the highest rate of all. Korean, Filipino, and Asian Indian men had the highest rates of intermarriage with Whites. Out of all of the groups, Korean women had an over 50% marriage rate to Whites. Le found that for Korean men, being born in the U.S. versus in Korea had an effect on marrying within the Korean population or pan-Asian. The opposite was true for Korean women in that being born in the U.S. made them less likely to marry a White man.

Le (2007) commented that the rates of Asian intermarriage with African American and Latino partners are lower than any other ethnic group and that there have been few studies that have explored this phenomenon. Le hypothesized that racism was the most logical reason for this and cited the example of marrying White as a way to assimilate into mainstream American culture. Le stated:

Although not characteristic of just Asians, the traditional Asian pursuit of status within the community and the larger society frequently leads to a rigid prohibition against interpersonal relationships with groups that are perceived to be of “lower” social standing than themselves, in this case Blacks and Hispanics/Latinos.  
(p. 177)

*Attitudes.* Pang (1998) conducted a study of attitudes toward interracial marriage with 20 single Korean Americans living in the San Francisco Bay area. The researcher



interviewed 9 females and 11 male participants. Pang found three major themes: attitudes of parents and participants toward intermarriage, attitudes toward the relationships between Asian American women and White men, and hierarchy of preference for spouse.

The first theme of parent and participants' attitudes toward intermarriage indicated that 15 out of the 20 reported the disapproval of marrying a non-Korean. Twenty-five percent reported that there may be some approval from parents depending on certain conditions such as education level, cultural sensitivity, and race and ethnicity of partner. Pang reported that the majority of participants found that pan-Asian marriage was more appropriate than across perceived racial lines. Pang discussed the possibility of U.S. military occupation in Korea and the prevalence of intermarriage between servicemen and Korean women as an impetus for negative attitudes towards these unions.

Another theme found a strong bias against the most prevalent pattern of Korean interracial relationships, that of Korean women with White men. Issues of betrayal were described as well as questioning of White men's desire for a submissive Asian woman. Some participants also questioned whether Korean women in relationships with White men garnered self-hate and a desire to assimilate into White culture.

The third theme of preference of the interracial spouse found a racial hierarchy that included various Asian ethnicities. For example, when asked about other Asian groups, Filipinos' "skin color was considered 'too dark' and thus less beautiful" (Pang, 1998, p. 130). The history of racial mixing within Filipinos' cultural history was also an issue. A subtheme was the relegation of African American marital partners to the lowest rung of the racial hierarchy. Pang reported that almost all of the participants discussed the parental disapproval of an African American partner. A major concern expressed by

Korean parents was that of the biracial children who would have dark skin and take on the stereotypical traits given to African Americans.

*Children.* Xie and Goyette (1997) discussed the possible reasons why families with a biracial Asian child may or may not identify them as Asian. The authors made a distinction between the socio-political factors surrounding children who are Asian/White and those who are Asian/African American or Latino. The researchers hypothesized based on the White dominant culture's racism against African Americans and Latinos that parents may choose to identify their children as Asian to lower their chances of being victims of racial bias. They also discussed the possibility that, due to the one-drop rule governing minority identification, this may prompt parents to identify their children with the non-Asian parent.

Xie and Goyette (1997) used data from the 1990 census to study children ages 0-14 living with one Asian and one non-Asian biological parent. The authors randomly selected one child per family for their analysis. Overall, there were 7,808 children included in the study. The authors reported that approximately 39% were identified as Asian. They reported that Filipino was the most prominent Asian ethnicity represented, followed by Japanese, Chinese, and Korean. Eighty-three percent of the non-Asian parents were identified as White.

The negative view of biracial children as a reason to not racially mix was reported by the participants in a study conducted by Weitzer (1997). Weitzer interviewed 30 Korean store owners in self-described lower- and middle-class African American neighborhoods in Washington D.C. Responses to the issue of intermarriage between

Koreans and African Americans were quite telling of the racial attitudes of this particular sample. The majority of participants were against intermarriage with African Americans. Issues of biology were often cited as a reason to oppose intermarriage between the two groups. Specifically, the issue of AAK children was mentioned “who are said to look strange, suffer from identity problems, and inherit low intelligence” (Weitzer, 1997, p. 598).

It is important to mention that the participants were also opposed to intermarriage with other racial groups, but some stated that they would tolerate relationships with Latinos, other Asians, or Whites. Weitzer (1997) reported that many of the participants believed that “Koreans should marry Koreans” (p. 598). These types of attitudes within the Korean American community toward interracial relationships and biracial children pose potential issues for individuals of African American and Korean heritage.

An example of the mistreatment of mixed-race Asian individuals can be seen in the treatment of Vietnam’s Amerasians. The term *Amerasian* has become synonymous with individuals of Vietnamese and American descent. The end of the Vietnam War in 1975 left approximately 30,000 Amerasian children in Vietnam (Valverde, 1992). According to Valverde, “Amerasians are caught between the politics of two nations, between immigrant and refugee status, between two races, cultures, and philosophies, between subhuman and human status, and between ‘dust’ and ‘gold’” (p. 144). Vietnamese in the United States continued the same negative attitudes towards Amerasians.

Bemak and Chung (1999) discussed reasons leading to the discrimination against Amerasians, in particular those with African American heritage. They cited phenotype of

these individuals due to the ethnic homogeneity of Vietnam and discrimination against darker skin. Bemak and Chung stated, “Amerasians grew up in a homogeneous society that stigmatized biraciality” (p. 455).

The previous research on interracial relationships shows that there is still stigma attached to interracial relationships and mixed-race children. There appears to be a continuum of level of acceptance of these relationships and mixed-race individuals depending on the racial groups involved. There continues to be a belief that intermarriage and children with African Americans among many members of non-African American racial groups is thought to be problematic and, for many, simply unacceptable.

#### Research on Mixed Race Asians

A review of the research on mixed-race Asians found that the majority of studies focused mainly on the process of racial identity, with special attention being paid to the influence of physical appearance and cultural knowledge on racial identity. It is important to note that the majority of research in this area has focused on the experiences of Eurasians of White and Japanese heritage. The smaller body of work on Afroasians has also been primarily on those with Japanese heritage. This may be partly explained by the number of researchers with biracial Japanese heritage as well as the high rate of intermarriage among Japanese Americans.

#### *Eurasians*

Several studies exemplify the focus of researchers on the process of racial identity among individuals with Asian and White heritage. One such study was conducted by

Ahnallen, Suyemoto, and Carter (2006) on the relationship of physical appearance and perception of group belonging and group exclusion on the racial identity of 50 Japanese and White adults. A questionnaire was distributed asking individuals how they racially identified themselves, how much they saw themselves looking Japanese and/or White, and their sense of belonging and exclusion to Japanese, White, and biracial groups.

Ahnallen et al. (2006) found that physical appearance was a factor in perceived acceptance by Whites. Also, a perceived physical appearance that indicated being of mixed race was significant for a Japanese American identity. The one variable that was shown to be significant to a Japanese, White, and/or biracial identity was feelings of exclusion. The researchers explained that having experienced any sort of situation that was perceived as not being accepted into a group factored into one's level of feeling of belonging to that particular group.

Khanna (2004) utilized Cooley's (1902) theory of reflected appraisal to examine what factored into a sample of 110 Asian/White participants' perception of their racial identity. The theory of reflected appraisal dictates that individuals form their self-concept partly from the messages they receive about themselves from others (Cooley, 1902). Khanna hypothesized that phenotype (i.e., looking more or less Asian) and cultural exposure (i.e., contact with Asian culture) would be the most influential in racial identity. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the researcher found that the majority of participants reported that their own physical characteristics influenced what they believed to be acceptance by both White and Asian groups. This idea of acceptance also is linked to cultural exposure. The author found that many of the participants discussed how other

people's reaction to their "cultural knowledge" (p. 126) influenced their sense of belonging to that particular group.

Standen (1996) conducted the only study to date on biracial Korean and White individuals. Standen's rationale for his study included that "the number of studies on the biracial experience, as a whole, is meager at best and nonexistent with regard to biracial Korean Americans" (p. 246). Standen conducted a qualitative study exploring the process of racial identity for eight WKAs (White Korean Americans). Specifically, Standen wanted to examine racial identity within the contexts of family, peers, and mainstream society. The sample was specific to those with a first-generation Korean immigrant mother and White father. The participants included an equal number of males and females that ranged in ages from 19-23 and who were all from Colorado.

As part of the interviews, Standen (1996) asked his participants to use a 5-point scale, where 1 was *not important* and 5 was *very important*, to rank the importance of race in their day-to-day interactions. Half of the sample reported that race was *not important*, one quarter responded *somewhat important*, and one quarter answered *very important*. The same scale was used in response to the question of how important is being Korean. All of the participants reported that being Korean was *very important*. When asked the same question on being White, half stated that it was *very important*, 25% answered that it was *not important*, and another 25% answered *somewhat important*. Seven out of the eight WKAs specifically included Asian as part of their racial identity. Interestingly, Standen reported that only three of them also included being White and Korean as their racial identity.

Standen's (1996) study also examined the influences of physical appearance and cultural access on racial identity. He found that all of his participants had been asked "What are you?" at certain times in their lives and that their supposed ambiguous physical appearance made them hard to define within the Korean and/or White groups. Lack of Korean language fluency was the main road block to immersion in Korean culture. The main conduit to Korean culture was through the participants' mothers.

Standen's findings included themes such as the importance of phenotype and cultural knowledge in the process of racial identity. Many participants described certain "symbolic interactions" (p. 257) with Korean culture that allowed them to foster a Korean identity. Due to the racism that is often expressed in regard to Afroasians, this access to certain aspects of Korean culture may be different for individuals of African American and Korean heritage. The participants in Standen's study also described their racial identity process within a majority/minority racial hierarchy. This process may also be different for AAKs.

### *Afroasians*

Hall's (1980) ground-breaking research on adults with African American and Japanese heritage has been credited as one of the first studies to exclusively explore the lived experiences of Afroasians. Hall conducted a mixed-methods study of 30 Black Japanese Americans (BJAs) in the Los Angeles area. Hall found that 18 out of the 30 participants identified solely as "Black." The following were found to be influences on the racial identification of the participants: demographics (ethnicity of neighbors and friends), age (younger vs. older), knowledge of culture and language, political

involvement, and acceptance by and of various groups. For example, Hall reported that there was a higher rate of BJAs identifying as Black when they reported living in a predominantly Black neighborhood and involvement primarily with Black friends. In addition, lack of comfort level and knowledge with Japanese culture led to a Black identity.

Thornton (1983) followed Hall in his study of BJAs and their families. Thornton interviewed a total of 61 individuals in Kansas, Washington D.C., Massachusetts, and Michigan. Thornton reported that 91% of participants in his study faced an identity crisis, “one that compelled them on some level to come to an individual decision as to who they were racially” (p. 123). The type and quality of the racial/ethnic identity of BJAs was measured in six ways: acceptance of other racial/ethnic groups, how they perceive they are accepted by others, indication of how much they believe they have in common with different groups, how comfortable they felt with different groups, a self-chosen racial/ethnic label, and quality of the knowledge they possessed of the groups of which they are a part. Overarching themes found were that racial identity is multifaceted and seldom encapsulated by any convenient racial label, there are qualitatively different reactions to similar situations and circumstances, and the appearance of four distinct identities: American, Biracials, Blacks, and Multiethnics.

Several studies have been conducted with a sample of both Eurasians and Afroasians. It is important to note that the samples are predominantly Eurasian. When placing these subgroups together, one can see the similarities and differences of their mixed-race experiences. One such study was done by Williams (1992), who interviewed 29 Eurasians and 14 Afroasians who had lived on two specific military bases in Japan to



explore their process of racial identity development. The sample all had Japanese mothers. Themes found in the development of identity in Williams' sample were relationships, the specific experience of being mixed-race Asian/American, and the context of living in Japan.

Relationships with family and peers were found to be important. Relationships with participants' mothers were influenced by generational and cultural differences. The majority of participants spent more time with their mothers due to the fathers' military duties. Although there was a sense of commonality with the fathers due to their shared sense of American culture, for the Afroasian participants there was another dimension of commonality with their fathers. Due to the lack of an African American community on the base, Williams (1992) concluded that "Afroasian children's only tie to their African American heritage was through their fathers and through what little African American history was offered in the Department of Defense schools. Thus their fathers' absence meant the absence of their African American heritage" (p. 286).

Relationships with peers were also found to be part of racial identity development. Across age and gender many participants talked about dating and friendships with primarily other mixed-race Asians. The researcher found that the participants had a sense of community with other Japanese and American individuals and sought them out as peers.

Many participants described others' reactions to their biracial heritage early on in childhood. While Americans usually had a hard time distinguishing their racial heritage, there was a sense that those who were Japanese knew that they were different. "The interviewees all described how Japanese people in general were 'envious'

(urayamashigaru) of, or ‘disgusted’ (kimochiwarugaru) by their physical characteristics” (Williams, 1992, p. 291). Interestingly, reactions to their physical appearance did not determine how the participants identified themselves racially.

Cultural knowledge, in particular, fluency of the Japanese language, was an important theme. All participants named their knowledge of both English and Japanese as having influenced their racial perception of self. Encounters with “American racism” (Williams, 1992, p. 296) was another theme that was reported by the participants. This seem to affect Afroasian participants the most, while living both in Japan and in the U.S. This seemed to be due to the U.S. American racial caste system that placed being African American at the lowest level.

An interesting aspect of Williams’ (1992) study was her explorations on what Afroasians and Eurasians thought about each other. Afroasians in the sample overall seemed to have had a deeper understanding of race relations in both Japan and the U.S. and detailed some instances where they were treated as less than by Eurasians but overall identified similarly with the Eurasians in the study. Eurasians seemed to have adopted a colorblind mentality and discussed the commonality of having a Japanese mother and U.S. American father. Further examination of these attitudes found underlying racism and White supremacist attitudes. Some of the Eurasians alluded to negative bias toward Japanese women who dated African American military men. There was also a sense of not wanting to acknowledge the institutional racism that is in place for African Americans.

Root (2001a) conducted a study of the process of racial identity for 20 pairs of biological biracial siblings. Six of the pairs were Eurasian and two were Afroasian. Root

(2001a) found the following themes in relation to the biracial Asian subgroups: family environment, color coding, exposure and isolation, generation, significance of racial mixture, and differences in gender. The importance of the family environment on the racial identity development of the participants could be seen in the effect of both positive and negative familial experiences. Root (2001a) reported that so-called “positive” family environments afforded individuals the safety to explore their racial selves. Root (2001a) stated, “Being able to feel loved, not having to attend much to parents’ emotional needs, and not worrying about the stability of parents’ relationships were associated with more integrated identities, regardless of the racial mixture” (p. 63). Issues of family dysfunction sometimes resulted in color coding. Root found that some of the siblings associated negative racial stereotypes with the parent who was the source of dysfunction. Cultural exposure was another theme in Root’s study. She found that exposure or lack thereof to Asian culture affected levels of identification with that culture. This could be seen with other heritages as well, not just the specific Asian culture.

Root (2001a) also found generational differences amongst her participants. She placed the participants in two distinct groups, those born during the time of the Korean War and those born after. A significant difference between the two groups is that the younger group had greater rates of two U.S. American-born parents. Root interjected that while Asian mothers are still most common, the younger group had a higher rate of Asian fathers with U.S. American mothers. Root stated, “In groups that are still very patrilineal, having an Asian American father may make acceptance a bit easier, particularly through surnames” (p. 67).

Another significant generational difference is the socio-political zeitgeist of race during the time of each group's birth. Root (2001a) described an American environment for the first-born group as one where there was little exposure about Asians and that to be called a "foreigner" was not uncommon. The second-born group of mixed-race Asians was afforded the luxury of being born and raised in a time where Asians moved up in the racial hierarchy of the U.S.

Root (2001a) declared that for the mixed-race Asians in her study, "Black and White still matter" (p. 67). The Afroasian participants reported more negative experiences and found fewer acceptances from Asian groups. Root also found that the Eurasian participants identified more as White with an acknowledgment of their Asian heritage and the Afroasians tended to identify racially as both African American and Asian.

The theme of gender also has implications when racial heritage is considered. For the mixed-race Asian women, having White physical characteristics were seen as an advantage in both White and Asian cultures. On the other hand, for the Afroasians, "Being black seemed to subsume their Asianness in the eyes of the outsider" (Root, 2001a, p. 69). The Eurasian women were able to conform to the White standard of beauty. This seemed to affect the Afroasian women's romantic partner choices as well. For men, stereotypes about African American and Asian men were prominent. Afroasian men described issues with negative stereotypes associated with African American men, while Eurasian males discussed negative stereotypes associated with the sexuality of Asian men.

Williams and Thornton (1998) conducted the only study to date to exclusively explore a diverse group of Afroasians. Being Afroasian equated to an Asian mother and

African American father. There were a total of 27 participants. Twenty-two had mothers who were Japanese, 3 Chinese, 2 Korean, and 2 Filipino. Interviews were conducted in Japan and California. Themes reported were: racial identity as a social construct, marginal status versus marginal personalities, and multiple group identity.

The theme of racial identity as a social construct has to do with what Williams and Thornton (1998) coined “racial moments” in the lives of the Afroasians. Participants described various interactions with others in which their racial identity was questioned or assumed. Twenty-five out of 27 participants described the experience of the difference in how they perceive themselves racially contrasted with how others saw them.

The second theme of marginal status versus marginal personalities describes the resiliency of the participants to thrive in a society that deemed them indefinable, therefore flawed; they have been able to define themselves and find their own place in the world. Eighteen out of the 27 participants reported that being Afroasian allowed them to have a foot in two cultures and that was seen as positive.

Multiple group identity refers to the theme in which the Afroasians within the sample have constructed a racial identity that encompasses multiple groups. Williams and Thornton (1998) stated, “They cultivate a complex understanding, of the socio-historical positions of the various racial groups to which they belong, and they try to understand the relationships of these groups with society” (p. 264).

What Williams and Thornton (1998) also illuminated was the varying of experiences specific to the ethnic group to which their participants belonged. In addition to within-group differences within the African American community, there were tremendous differences in culture among Asian ethnic groups. For example, an African

American and Korean participant discussed eating kimchee and bulgogi, an African American and Japanese participant described being asked about Pearl Harbor, and an African American and Chinese participant discussed the impact of reading the history of the African American and Chinese in rural Mississippi. What this showed is the importance of isolating particular groups of mixed-race individuals for study due to the great cultural variation within the Asian and African American communities. Thus, the current investigation focused exclusively on adults of African American and Korean heritage. Interestingly, while there has been only a small amount of literature on those labeled as mixed-race Asians, there is an almost non-existent body of literature on those deemed mixed-race African Americans. One must examine the social construction of race and rules of hypodescent and how they have affected African Americans to get answers to why this is.

Davis (1991) stated that “not only does the one-drop rule apply to no other group than American blacks, but apparently the rule is unique in that it is found only in the United States and not in any other nation in the world” (p. 13). Davis pointed out that the majority of defined African Americans in the U.S. are of mixed race. For mixed-race individuals, hypodescent comes into play where the mixed-race individual is assumed to be racially identified with the parent of the lowest status. For example, an AAK would be considered African American due to that group having a lower social standing than Koreans. It is this assumption that has led to a gap in the literature.

*Hines Ward.* “Super Bowl MVP aims to open eyes to plight of those of mixed blood,” “Mixed-blood: Taking Korea from racial purity to ethnic diversity,” and “Hines

Ward hapa hero,” are just some of the headlines in both the U.S. and South Korea that surrounded Hines Ward’s trip to South Korea. One can venture a guess that Ward is not the only AAK who has traveled to Korea, but his status as a wide receiver for the Pittsburgh Steelers as well as a Super Bowl MVP pushed him into the international spotlight.

The spotlight placed on the racial heritage of Hines Ward is indicative of the controversy that surrounds those of mixed race. Rules of hypo descent abound for biracial African Americans, and here was an African American man dressed in traditional Korean garb discussing his life with a Korean mother. In a country where we ask individuals to check a box defining who they are racially and ask people who are not physically definable “What are you?” Hines Ward on television sets and newspapers across the country piqued the interest of many Americans. This phenomenon is best described by Rockquemore (2004), who discussed the way that socially constructed categories of race impact how individuals react and interact with one another.

There were people who began to question the hoopla over Hines Ward’s supposed acceptance by the Korean media. Lim (2006) stated that “no single piece of legislation, however, can come close to resolving the problems of ‘mixed-race’ children in Korea, where the concept of ethnicity is inseparably tied to the purity of ‘Korean blood’” (p. 1). Lim discussed this tie to pure Korean blood in his own experience of having two Korean parents who, like himself, were born and raised in the United States. He would be considered to be more Korean than a mixed-race person who had lived in Korea all of his life, but he offers a caveat that due to poor Korean language skills and having lived in the U.S., his Korean ethnicity would also be up for questioning.

The Internet served as a sounding board for many AAKs who, in particular, questioned the South Korean government's heralding of Hines Ward's visit. In a blog posting titled "Korean Folks Don't Like Black People" (2006), a blogger who also happens to be an AAK living in South Korea questioned the "sudden motivation to claim a black/Korean mixed race person as Korea's own." He questioned how the Korean media had told Ward's story as one of the good Korean mother and the bad African American father. Did this make it easier for him to be accepted by Koreans? The blogger also discussed the day-to-day racism that he as well as other AAKs have encountered in South Korea and the negative reactions to Korean women who choose to date African American servicemen. What this illuminates is the possible acceptance of Hines Ward as a celebrity and not necessarily an acceptance of all of those who have African American and Korean heritage.

The socio-political climate that surrounds issues of cross-race relations presents unique challenges for the mixed-race individual. Given the current state of the literature on mixed-race individuals, researchers do not have a clear understanding of the lived experiences of adults with African American and Korean heritages. The current study was concerned with the exploration of the inner worlds of adults with African American and Korean heritages.



## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the lived experiences of adults with African American and Korean heritages. There has been no study to date that has exclusively studied this population. Due to the paucity of research on this specific population and the researcher's aim to tell the participants' stories in their own words, a qualitative phenomenological approach was used.

This chapter presents the rationale and methodology employed in this study. The first section presents the research questions investigated. The second section discusses the appropriateness of using qualitative methodology and phenomenological methods and the research paradigm that framed the current investigation. The third section details the participant recruitment and selection that was used. Fourth, data collection and study procedures are discussed. Method of data analysis is presented in the fifth section.

#### Research Questions

This study explored four research questions related to meanings that a group of adults with African American and Korean heritages made of their lived experiences. Semi-structured ethnographic interviews aimed to explore the following research questions:

1. How does a small group of AAK adults living in the U.S. go about making their way through life?
2. What issues arise for these AAK adults?
3. How do they face the challenging situations they meet?
4. What suggestions do they have for other AAK individuals and those encountering them?

### Qualitative Research, Phenomenology, and Research Paradigm

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) defined qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). They go on to describe the qualitative researcher as one who is interested in naturalistic inquiry and is about “attempting to make sense of, or integrate, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). These definitions bring to light the purpose of the present qualitative study. The “world” in which I situated myself in was that of a small group of adults with African American and Korean ancestry. Through qualitative methods I endeavored to make sense of the meanings made by the participants experiencing the phenomena.

Creswell (1998) provided guidelines that researchers should consider to determine whether their study is appropriate for qualitative methodology, such as use of research questions asking how and what versus why, lack of previous exploration of the topic, desire to study participants in their natural setting, and aim to “emphasize the researcher’s role as an *active learner* who can tell the story from the participants’ view rather than as an ‘expert’ who passes judgment on participants” (p. 18). The present study fits the criteria outlined above in that its intent was to investigate how a small group of AAKs

made meaning of their life experiences. In addition, there has been no study to date that has exclusively studied AAKs. A major goal of this study was to tell the participants' stories using their own words as much as possible, which addresses Creswell's final criteria for use of qualitative methodology.

Both Root (1992) and Renn (2004) recommended qualitative methodology for the study of biracial populations. Root stated that qualitative methods lent themselves to small samples and allowed for the "observation and description for understanding the phenomenology of the group" (p. 186). Root also found that quantitative methods were "too reductionistic for this area of inquiry" (p. 183). Renn offered guidelines for researchers interested in studying those of multiple heritages. One of her suggestions was to employ a qualitative approach. Renn stated, "A qualitative approach offers a number of strengths that are particularly used in studying a social construction like race without further fixing it as a static, given concept" (p. 12). In the same vein, Orbe (2000) stated that phenomenology, in particular, was appropriate for researching diverse participants due to "providing multidimensional descriptions of various issues related to race/ethnicity" (p. 605).

### *Phenomenology*

Philosopher Edmund Husserl is considered the founder of "modern" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 4) phenomenology. According to Giorgi:

Phenomenology as a philosophy seeks to understand anything at all that can be experienced through the consciousness one has of whatever is "given"—whether it be an object, a person, or a complex state of affairs—from the perspective of the conscious person undergoing the experience. (p. 4)

Specific to psychology, Wertz (2005) discussed that “Husserl formulated scientific methods are uniquely fashioned to assist psychological researchers in the investigation of human experience and behavior” (p. 167).

A key aspect of phenomenology is its aim to explore individuals’ meaning making in their everyday lives and experiences (Creswell, 1998). It is this emphasis on “meaning” that makes phenomenology appropriate for the study of the lived experiences of adults with African American and Korean heritage. Moustakas (1994) stated that “the empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (p. 13). One of the objectives of phenomenology is to escape from the primacy of theories, concepts, and symbols; it strives for a direct investigation of the phenomena.

### *Research Paradigm*

Ponterotto (2005) urged that counseling researchers situate their qualitative research studies within an identifiable research paradigm which I will do here. Guba and Lincoln (2005) outlined the basic beliefs of various qualitative research paradigms in regard to several key issues. It is their outline of the constructivist paradigm that was used for this study. According to Guba and Lincoln, constructivism is concerned with the ideas of co-constructed realities, created findings, and employs a hermeneutical methodology. Specifically, constructivism aims to understand and uses the “passionate participant as facilitator of multivoice reconstruction” (p. 195).

Van Manen (1990) defined hermeneutics as “interpretation of experience via some ‘text’ or via some symbolic form” (p. 25). Texts or symbolic forms can be thought of as more than that of written documents. The notion that people themselves are “living human documents” is adapted from Gerkin (1984) and is one of the central ideas of the current investigation. Gerkin stated:

To understand the inner world of another is therefore a task of interpretation—interpretation of a world of experience that is itself an interpretation of the myriad of events and relationships that make up a life. Said another way, the task of understanding another in the depth of that inner world is a hermeneutical task. (p. 40)

One of my intentions for this study was to understand how adults of African American and Korean heritages made sense of their worlds.

I wanted also to explore the many dimensions of personhood of the participants and to offer the reader a deeper view into their lived experiences. The concept of dimensions is indicative of a humanistic view of individuals. This view is in line with the philosophy of hermeneutics. Patton (2002) stated, “Hermeneutics reminds us of the interpretive core of qualitative inquiry, the importance of context and the dynamic whole-part interrelations of a holistic perspective” (p. 498). I believe that the only way to honor these individuals is to tell their stories in their own words. I believe that the underpinnings of hermeneutics allowed me to accomplish this goal.

### *Research Participants*

In regard to potential sample size, qualitative research methods are concerned with the idea of quality versus quantity (Padgett, 2008; Patton, 2002). Padgett explained that qualitative research differs from quantitative methods in that “the focus is on

flexibility and depth rather than on mathematical probabilities and external validity” (p. 56). Patton discussed the decisions made by qualitative researchers on whether they are aiming for breadth or depth of data and that this decision will help inform their sample size. For the current investigation, a small group of participants was sought in order to gain depth by developing close relationships with the interviewees that provided data that were rich.

In order to gather data that are rich, it is important to find what is known as informants by those engaging in ethnographic interviewing. According to Spradley and McCurdy (1988), a good informant knows the culture under investigation well, is willing to talk, and is “one who communicates about his culture in a nonanalytic manner” (p. 47). In order to make sure that the informants for this study were immersed in the culture under investigation, adults at least 18 years of age who had one biological parent who identified as Korean and another parent who identified as African American were recruited. Fetterman’s (1989) guidelines of judgmental sampling allowed the researcher to ensure that the informants met the last two requirements provided by Spradley and McCurdy (1988). Judgmental sampling is a strategy that allows researchers to use their own judgment in choosing the most appropriate cultural informants. I utilized this approach as I met with potential informants and gauged their appropriateness for the current study. Finally, all possible interviewees had to be willing and able to commit to at least two interview sessions, and possibly more.

I contacted mixed race, African American, and Korean university student groups and online organizations in an effort to gauge the potential recruitment of future study participants. Emails were sent out detailing who I was and that I was conducting an

interview research study exploring the inner worlds of adults of Korean and African American heritage (see Appendix A). This was done in light of what Root (1992) described as the often difficult task in obtaining samples of biracial/multiracial research participants. This difficulty is due to the many different ways in which mixed-race people identify and socio-environmental factors impacting racial identity. Due to this complexity, I made sure to contact not just exclusively groups and organizations that labeled themselves as mixed race but also monoracial African American and Korean groups as well. No potential participants were recruited from the student groups contacted. All participants recruited were from the online organizations contacted.

In addition, snowball sampling was utilized in order to gain access to additional participants that might not have been directly connected to the organizations contacted (see Appendix B). Snowball sampling involved asking participants to recommend others who may have been appropriate for study participation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Each potential participant received a verbal explanation about the researcher's purpose, the nature of the study, and information about how he or she came to be asked. I assured all participants that they would remain anonymous in any written reports growing out of this study, that their responses would be treated in the strictest confidence, and that the results would be shared with them after the study was completed, if they so desired. All potential participants had a chance to review and discuss the informed consent form and ask questions prior to agreeing to participate in the interview. Thus, before any individuals agreed to participate in the interview, I emailed all potential participants a copy of the consent form. Participants had the opportunity to email and call the researcher with questions and concerns. The potential participant and I mutually agreed upon the

date, time, and location for completing the consent process and proceeding with the interview. All participants had the opportunity to ask questions. Participants were presented two consent forms, one to sign and one to keep for themselves. Each interview began after the consent form had been signed (see Appendix C).

## Data Collection and Data Analysis

### *Data Collection*

*Ethnographic interviews.* The ethnographic interview was the primary data collection strategy used in this investigation because it offered the best access to the lived experiences of adults of African American and Korean heritage. According to Heyl (2001), ethnographic interviews assist researchers in gathering “rich, detailed data directly from participants in the social worlds under study” (p. 369). Ethnographic interviews are more like casual conversations between the researcher and participant (Fetterman, 1989). This informal interview format allows for the establishment and maintenance of rapport between researcher and participants (Fetterman, 1989). Fetterman explained that informal ethnographic interviews are user-friendly, and although the researcher has questions to ask the participant, they are aware of the appropriate time to ask them. Fetterman described that “done well, informal interviewing feels like natural dialogue but answers the fieldworker’s unasked questions” (p. 49).

This informality can pose some ethical concerns for the researcher. Heyl (2001) offers four goals for researchers engaged in ethnographic interviewing:



1. Listen well and respectfully, adhering to ethical guidelines within the participant-researcher relationship.
2. Be self-aware about the researcher role in co-construction of meaning during the interview process.
3. Be cognizant of ways in which both the ongoing relationship and the broader social context affect the participants, the interview process, and the project outcomes.
4. Recognize that dialogue is discovery and only partial knowledge will ever be attained.

Each participant was asked to commit to two interviews. After each interview, I wrote down my impressions, reflections on how the interview had gone, and the topics that were covered. This process allowed me to reflect on the data already obtained to see if there were additional questions that I should ask to allow a deeper understanding of the topic being explored. I then incorporated these questions into the follow-up interviews. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

At the beginning of each interview session, the purpose of the interview was explained to each participant. I reassured each participant that her or his participation would be confidential and that no identifying information would be used in the report. Furthermore, participants were reminded that their involvement in the study was voluntary, and that they could decide to withdraw at any time without negative repercussions. By explaining the research project and the investigator's purpose as often as required, and by asking open-ended questions and supporting extended responses, I

attempted to create a safe interview situation so that informants could share themselves more openly.

The initial interview was conducted in person at a location in the participant's home community, which was favorable for everyday conversation and mutually agreed upon by both the interviewer and each participant. Life experiences in 10 chosen life domains were inquired about during the initial interview: self, family, residential, romance, spirituality, social/political, leisure, education, relationships, and career (see Appendix D). Prior to the follow-up interviews, each participant was sent by email her/his individual transcript of the initial interview (see Appendix E). Each participant was asked to reflect on these items in preparation for the follow-up interview and to share feedback during the interview, particularly regarding whether she/he felt that the transcript accurately gave voice to her/his own story. Participants were also asked follow-up questions (see Appendix F).

*Field log.* According to Ely (1991), "The log is the place where each qualitative researcher faces the self as instrument through a personal dialogue about moments of victory and disheartenment, hunches, feelings, insights, assumptions, biases, and ongoing ideas about the method" (p. 69). These observations were captured with field notes, which are the written account of the researcher's observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

In an effort to capture more completely the meaning and context of the interviews and observations, I recorded field notes after each event. These field notes were both descriptive and reflective in nature. My aim in the description was to record as

objectively as possible the details of what had occurred in the field. The goal for reflection was to address my personal thoughts about the course of the inquiry.

In addition to field notes, analytic memos were recorded to aid in furthering data collection and analysis. According to Ely (1991), these memos are written about the log entries and “can be thought of as conversations with oneself about what has occurred in the research process, what has been learned, the insights this provides, and the leads these suggest for future action” (p. 80). Throughout this investigation, I wrote memos to myself as a way to stay focused and to move the inquiry forward.

*The log.* The log was the repository of all the data gathered during the course of this investigation. All that I observed and the data I obtained from interviews were placed in the log. I also entered into the log all of the informal contacts I had with study participants. The log was a chronological account of the research project (Ely, 1991).

### *Data Analysis*

One of my goals for this study was to allow for a deeper and richer understanding of the cultural and social worlds of adults of Korean and African American heritages. Thus, my main purpose for data analysis was to discover major themes in the data for each individual participant and for the group as a whole. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), this process entails organizing the data, breaking it into manageable units, coding, synthesizing, and looking for patterns. What Bogdan and Biklen described is similar to the concept of the hermeneutic circle for data interpretation. Patton (2002) defined the hermeneutic circle as “an analytical process aimed at enhancing understanding, [which]

offers a particular emphasis in qualitative analysis, namely, relating parts of wholes, and wholes to parts” (p. 497).

My process of data analysis began as soon as I started to collect data. I read through the data and looked for patterns, language, events, etc., that stood out. I then developed a coding system. Following Bogdan and Biklen (2007), this coding system involved the following steps:

1. Searching the data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics the data covered
2. Writing down words and phrases to represent these patterns and topics
3. The aforementioned words/phrases became the coding categories, which were a means to organize the data.

After categorizing the data, I looked for beginning themes. “Theme” in the analysis was defined as a statement of meaning that ran through all or most of the interviews, or one in the minority that carried heavy emotional or factual impact (Ely, 1984).

Each category was analyzed separately. I recorded themes that emerged within and between categories. New impressions were noted and additional categories added as they appeared. As themes developed, verbatim statements by the participants taken from the transcript were listed under the appropriate category in an effort to link the heading with the data from which they emerged.

The themes for each participant were placed side-by-side so that the range could be seen more clearly. The commonalities and differences in the profiles that developed for each participant were examined. Attempts were made to identify themes that were unique to each individual and themes that represented the group as a whole.

After analyzing the first round of interviews, I consulted with an external auditor. The auditor was an African American female who worked as an assistant professor in the counseling field at a major university. The auditor provided feedback on the development of codes and initial themes from the first round of data collection. This process was repeated after collection and analysis of the second round of interviews as well. Additionally, the auditor also reviewed the overall summary of findings.

I considered the auditor's suggestions carefully and made decisions about what changes to integrate. One example of feedback that was provided by the auditor and that I included was the creation of a Korean culture essential theme that would include tradition of the eldest daughter as a subtheme. In another example, I reviewed the auditor's suggestion that the preliminary theme of feeling different be a contextual frame to the essential theme of lack of interaction with other AAKs. Upon review, I felt that the expression of feeling different amongst participants was important enough to warrant being labeled as an essential theme and subsequently it became the theme of lived experience of being the othered "other."

### Trustworthiness

In implementing a qualitative research methodology, it is important to understand that the quantitative ideas of validity and reliability do not apply. Instead, the idea of trustworthiness is most appropriate. Ely (1991) described trustworthiness for the qualitative researcher as one in which the research was carried out fairly, grounded in ethical principles in regard to data collection and analysis, and the products of the research closely as possible represent the experience of the people who were studied.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines for establishing trustworthiness were used for the current investigation.

The criteria that Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed were that of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The first criterion of credibility refers to the degree of fit between the participants' stories and the researcher's description and interpretation of these stories (Padgett, 2008). Lincoln and Guba stated that there are several activities that the researcher can engage in to increase credibility. One of these activities is that of prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement involves "the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the 'culture,' testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301).

In the current investigation, strengthening of credibility was ensured by allowing sufficient interview time in both the initial and follow-up interviews. Member checks were also used to increase credibility. This involved returning to the participants in order to obtain their perspectives on the accuracy and credibility of the data, analyses, and interpretations (Creswell, 1998). The follow-up interviews served as an opportunity to engage in member checking.

Credibility can also be enhanced by paying close attention to the details of data collection, processing, and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Every attempt was made to ensure that the categories and themes actually emerged from the data. As themes developed, verbatim statements by the participants were taken from the transcripts and listed under the appropriate category in an effort to link the headings with the data from which they emerged.

Transferability refers to the generalizability of a study's findings (Padgett, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) made it clear that this is not to be confused with the quantitative idea of external validity. Lincoln and Guba described that, for the qualitative researcher, transferability is about putting research findings in context. Lincoln and Guba stated, "The naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (p. 316). Thus, I provided thick description, including the use of extended quotes and attempted to make clear to the reader the connection between what the participant had said and my understanding of it to ensure transferability.

The criterion of dependability speaks to the "means that the study's procedures are documented and traceable" (Padgett, 2008, p. 181). In addition, the concept of confirmability refers to whether the findings are coherent and supported by the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the current study, dependability and confirmability were ensured by the researcher's attention to effective organization of data, including use of a field log, overall research project log, writing of field notes/memos, as well as the use of an external auditor.

### Personal Stance

Ely (1991) discussed that, for qualitative researchers, topics for research typically mesh intimately with their deepest professional and social commitments. I acknowledge that the interest and decision to embark on this particular area of research and my theoretical and philosophical approach come directly from my own experiences as a

woman of Korean and African American heritage. I was born in Uijeongbu, South Korea in a U.S. military hospital to a South Korean mother and an African American father. The year that we lived there I don't remember, but photos of me laughing with my Korean cousins in an inflatable swimming pool and the one of my mother, halmoni (grandmother), and emo (aunt) bathing me as an infant are living proof of my short time there. I have not been back to Korea since.

For the first 14 years of my life, I was an Army brat. My family and I lived in California and Germany before settling in the Midwest. The last time I was around any other AAKs was in Germany. I had two friends who were girls my age. Our mothers were friends and I can remember sleepovers with the girls playing in one room and the mothers speaking lively Korean to each other in the next. Sometimes I think of those girls and wonder about their lives today.

My mom tells stories of conversations that she had with me about the world seeing me as African American and my response being, "But Daddy is African American and I am Korean like you." As I think back on my early racial identity development, the theme that sticks out in my mind is that I have always seen myself as African American. I watched Soul Train every Saturday morning and when the news told of the Atlanta child murderer who was kidnapping African American children, I was scared that he was going to come through my window and get me, too. Both my parents felt it was important that I learn African American history. We watched movies like *Roots* and *Mississippi Burning* together, and I grew up hearing stories of the racism and discrimination that my dad faced growing up African American and poor in the 40s and 50s and as an African American man in the Army in the 60s.



I grew up also hearing the stories of discrimination that my mom faced and, more importantly, witnessing her struggle as an immigrant Korean woman in the U.S. She never gave many details, but I knew that at many of her jobs she was discriminated against. I can feel her shame as she struggles to read and write English. As salespeople ask her what she is saying and look toward me to explain, I feel my own shame as I, a little too quickly, clarify my mother's broken English. My mother tells of her fantasies of what the U.S. would be like and her disappointment when she arrived and experienced a hotel owner first giving her a room in the front of the hotel and changing his mind after seeing my father carrying the luggage from their car. They slept in a room in the back of the hotel.

At the age of 14 we moved to the Midwest and settled in the town where my dad was born and raised. I started eighth grade with a rocky start. The first day of school, I knew no one. I can remember spending the lunch period in the girls' bathroom. My cousin went to the same school, but he was a boy. The girls all looked at me like, "Who the hell are you?" and the boys wanted to know my name. I just assumed that I would be hanging with the African American kids, but for some reason, entry into this group wasn't so easy. It was during this time I was first asked the question, "What are you?" I settled into my peer group, but there were some definite struggles. There was more than one African American girl who did not like me. They said that I thought I was better than somebody, that my light skin and long hair made me feel superior. Little did they know I just wanted to be like them. I hated my wavy hair. I even had my best friend put in a relaxer to make it straight. I can still hear them call me "pie face" or talk about my "chinky" eyes.

This is not to say that there were no other biracial kids in school. The majority of them were African American and White, and one of my best friends was African American and Hawaiian. There was one girl who was African American and Japanese and, of course, everyone wanted to know if we were sisters. I tried to distance myself from her; I hated when people asked me if we were related. I remember her tragic story that swirled around the school. Her mom was Japanese, and when she moved here and saw how her poor African American husband's family lived, she went back to Japan and left her daughter here, never to see her again. I can remember her, trying to navigate through adolescence just like me. I wonder what would have happened if we had talked.

I vividly remember working at my first job as a cashier at the local downtown drugstore. I was 16 and there were these two African American men talking and looking at me from the aisle next to my register. One of them came up to me and said that they had a bet going; one of them was betting money that I was Black, and the other one was betting money that I wasn't. As I got older, I would get so angry when people would ask "what" I was. They wanted to know, was I Filipino, Hawaiian, Puerto Rican, Samoan, etc., etc. "I am a human being!" I would scream. When I *would* tell someone that I was African American and Asian, the first thing that would come out of their mouths was, "Oh, so you're Chinese?"

College began and I naturally gravitated toward an African American peer group. I had dated African American guys in high school and continued to do so in college. There was never any question. I can remember going out with some White women who lived on my floor my freshman year in college. The next day one of them told me that some of the White guys we met the night before thought I was cute and wanted to know what my race

was. I had had White guys interested in me before but never really saw them as a dating option. During grad school I had a White male colleague who was “clearly” interested (as my best friend says), and I can remember wrestling with the feeling of uncertainty about his intentions. Is he really asking me out or does he just want to try out an African American woman? White men use you, don’t they? That’s what I had heard from my family anyway. What would people think of me? Would they question my Blackness like we questioned the Blackness of the African American guys in high school who dated White women? That one girl in high school hung around all White people and dated White guys. Didn’t we call her a sell-out? That isn’t me. But both my parents have dated White people in the past and aren’t they married to each other? My mom is not African American; what does this all mean?

A few years ago I went into a Korean store and I was browsing, looking at kimchee. The two owners were following me around the store, and when I asked a question about whether they had any turnip kimchee, I got a curt “no” and a look like, “What the hell are you doing in here anyway?” I left and cried all the way home. They did not see me as Korean and I felt that to the core of my being. I was just another suspicious African American in their eyes and it hurt. They didn’t know that I had been eating kimchee since the womb and that my favorite meal in the whole wide world is duk guk.

Many researchers advocate for the process of bracketing, as defined by Creswell (1998) as the ability of the researcher to “set aside all prejudgments” (p. 52). While at the start of my study I had questions regarding the extent to which this is possible for a researcher, I have worked toward this goal in my research procedures and analysis. I believe that membership in the community I studied allowed me to create space for the

participants to share their personal stories. Articulating my personal stance to the members of my dissertation committee and the use of an external auditor during data analysis was intended to allow for scrutiny of my work and the conditions under which it was produced.

I have been hesitant to share my story with the world, as to not substantiate stereotypes of biracial kids who are mixed up and confused. Over the years, I have come to embrace my experiences as unique and important. I have had the privilege to live in a loving family of both African American and Korean heritages and I am proud of who I am. My story is a human story, with pain, laughter, and triumph, yet mine is but one experience in a tapestry of many AAKs. With this qualitative study, I add the voices of a group of AAKs to the discourse on the complexity of the biracial experience and, more importantly, to that of the human experience.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The aim of this phenomenological investigation was to give voice to the lived experiences of a small group of adults with African American and Korean heritages. What follows are the results of analyzing the data from in-depth ethnographic interviews with seven participants and follow-up phone interviews with five out of the seven individuals. The purpose of data analysis was to discover major themes and subthemes that illuminated aspects of lived experience for these African American and Korean adults. It is important to make clear that, while commonalities within the collective life stories will be highlighted, each individual is unique and presenting these results should not be used to categorize all individuals with the same cultural background as the same (Houston, 2002). Having said this, the themes and subthemes that emerged are important to discuss and ponder, as they do provide valuable insight on what challenges and triumphs AAKs living in the United States may encounter.

The chapter begins with a brief description of each of the seven participants that were interviewed, with pseudonyms that will allow for confidentiality and the opportunity to reference back to their description throughout the chapter. Secondly, data analysis procedures will be briefly reviewed and, finally, themes and subthemes will be presented.

## Description of Participants

This section provides descriptions of each participant, including demographic information and details on the interview location and setting. I have also provided details on aspects of the participants' interaction with myself as the researcher that were recorded in the field log after interviews were conducted. Information on any pertinent observations that were gathered is an important part of the ethnographic interviewing process (Spradley, 1979).

“Lela” was the first participant interviewed. She is a woman in her early thirties who currently lives on the East coast in the same city in which she grew up. She lives in the basement of her parents' home and this is where the interview took place. I arrived at her home in the early afternoon, a time which allowed her to sleep as she worked in the evening as a medical professional. The basement was set up like a small apartment and we sat around a coffee table where the recording device was placed. Lela shared that she was a student studying nursing and was currently dating a somewhat older African American man who was a church pastor. She shared that she has an older brother who lives elsewhere in the state with his wife, who was identified as African American. Toward the end of the interview, Lela took a phone call from her mother, who wanted to know where my mom was, when I was leaving the area, if I liked kimchee, and if I wanted to take some when I left. Before I left, Lela packed a small container for me to take to my mom, who was staying in another part of the state. Lela shared that there have been times when her mother did not buy kimchee due to being embarrassed of the smell. After numerous attempts to contact Lela for the follow-up interview, Lela sent an email

informing me that she was declining participation in the second round but wished me well in my research.

“Janet” was interviewed the day after Lela. She lives in a major city in another state on the East coast. Janet met me at a train station and we walked together to a coffee shop where the recorded interview took place. During the walk, Janet revealed that she had completed her bachelor’s degree at a large institution in the Midwest. It appeared initially that Janet was reserved in her interaction with me as evidenced by needing to be prompted with questions and probes to talk. As the interview continued, Janet seemed to become more forthcoming and engaged. Janet’s parents are divorced and both have remarried. She reported being the only child of her parents but has two half siblings on her father’s side.

“Vivian” was the third participant interviewed. She is a woman in her late twenties living in a medium-sized Midwestern city with her husband and two small children. During the time of the interview, Vivian was pregnant with her third child. Vivian invited me to lunch at her workplace before the recorded interview took place. Vivian brought from home and cooked in her office’s kitchen traditional Korean foods of rice, bulgogi, kimchee, and gocuchang. She invited co-workers to join as well. Vivian is a graduate student who works full-time at the same university where she is a student. She is the oldest of three children with a younger sister and brother who have a different father (who is also African American). Vivian reported that her father is deceased. Vivian provided the researcher with a tour of her workplace before going into her private office for the recorded interview.

“Sheila” and her brother “Jack” were the fourth and fifth (respectively) participants interviewed. They both lived in the same major southern city. Sheila is the oldest and only daughter in a family that includes two sons. She is married with no children. Sheila is a Navy veteran and has a bachelor’s degree. At the time of the first interview, she was working part-time at the same company as her husband, but during the second interview reported that she is no longer working. Sheila reported that she is currently estranged from her parents, who are still married. The recorded interview was conducted at Sheila’s home. Upon first meeting, both Sheila and I remarked at our startling physical resemblance. Sheila even commented when she heard my voice through the intercom system used to allow entry into her gated community, there was even a vocal resemblance.

Jack was interviewed later the same day as his sister Sheila in his home where his wife and son were present but not in the same room. I was greeted at the door by the family, and due to the aforementioned resemblance to Sheila, Jack’s son initially thought that I was his Aunt Sheila. All three adults commented on this and had a nice laugh. Jack is a male in his early thirties who, in addition to his son with his wife, also has a daughter from a previous relationship. He was working full-time at the same company as his sister and brother-in-law as well as attending college part-time for a bachelor’s in education. Jack did not respond to the numerous attempts to contact him for the follow-up interview. He subsequently was not included in the second round of data collection.

“Alicia” and “Nora” are sisters and were both interviewed separately on the same day. After several emails regarding scheduling of the interviews, Alicia offered to pick



me up from the airport after I flew into a mid-sized city on the West coast where Alicia lives. Alicia, Nora, and Nora's youngest son arrived at the airport and we all drove to a Korean restaurant for lunch before driving to the college campus where Alicia works where both interviews were conducted separately.

Alicia is a woman in her late forties who is married to a man of Japanese and White descent. They are parents to a young daughter they adopted from China as an infant. Alicia is the oldest female out of a total of five siblings. Alicia and Nora's parents divorced when they were young children and there is a complicated childhood history. Their father died during the time in between the first and second interviews. After the day of in-person interviews with both Alicia and Nora, I accompanied Alicia to pick up her daughter from daycare and she drove me back to my hotel.

Nora is a woman in her late forties who also lives on the West coast but in a larger city further south than Alicia. She is married with two sons from a previous marriage and is also stepmother to two sons. Nora has a bachelor's degree and works for a major university in administration. Nora shared that her stepsons are biracial of African American and Latino descent and were participating in a research study about biracial boys and identity development through a local university.

In regard to participant demographics, there are some important commonalities and differences amongst them. There was significant variability in location amongst participants. In summary, two were from the East coast, two from the West coast, two from the South, and one participant from the Midwest. This regional variability allowed for important diversity amongst the participants interviewed and to be able to speak to regional differences that may be important in the lived experiences of AAKs. Another

significant aspect of the participants is the range of ages, including those in their late twenties to late forties. It is also important to note that the gender of the participants was overwhelmingly female, with only one male out of the seven AAKs.

There were also two sets of siblings included amongst the participants (Sheila/Jack and Alicia/Nora). This dynamic allowed for a reflection on any similarities/differences of aspects of lived experiences from siblings who grew up in the same family environment. The most prominent commonality within this group of AAKs is that all seven had mothers who were Korean immigrants and African American fathers in the military. This is an important aspect of shared lived experiences for these AAKs and will be discussed further in the essential themes that emerged via data analysis.

### Essential Thematic Insights

The first round interviews generated a total of 250 single-spaced pages of data on the lived experiences of the seven AAKs. Five out of the seven individuals participated in the second interview, and those interviews yielded an additional 62 single-spaced pages of data for a total of 312 pages of descriptions of the lived experiences of AAKs.

The data analysis process began as each individual interview was transcribed verbatim and searched for patterns/language/events that stood out to the researcher related to the phenomenon of AAK lived experiences. After each individual interview was preliminary themed, a coding system was developed similar to the one described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) where the aforementioned patterns that were found were given words and/or phrases that best captured their meaning. This coding system helped to see the themes that existed amongst the seven participants. An auditor was used to help refine

themes and search for possible researcher bias. The coding system and two randomly chosen transcripts were sent to the auditor after an initial analysis of first-round interview data. This process was duplicated after the second round of interviews was analyzed by the researcher, and the coding system was revised to include any new data found during the follow-up interviews.

The initial round of data analysis yielded 14 potential, or in phenomenological terms, paradigmatic themes (Lanigan, 1979). The 14 preliminary themes were: (1) feeling different, (2) there's something about being Black and Asian, (3) lack of interaction with other AAKs, (4) perceived Korean tradition of eldest daughter's duties and less responsibility for sons, (5) military life, (6) gravitating toward Black partners in dating, (7) encounters with race and/or racism, (8) raising children, (9) being asked "What are you?" (10) hair stories, (11) exposure to/striving to connect with Korean culture, (12) my mom is "different," (13) interactions with African American women, and (14) interactions with White women, Black men, White men, and biracial individuals. Upon further analysis and feedback from the external auditor used to ensure rigor, five themes emerged as most salient to the lived experiences of all seven participants. These were: (1) Negotiation of Racial Identity(ies), (2) Absence of AAK Communal Group, (3) Lived Experiences as Othered "Other," (4) Reflections of Korean Cultural Influences, and (5) Relationships with African American Partners. The heart of this chapter focuses on explicating each of these essential themes and their respective subthemes.

*Negotiation of Racial Identity(ies)*

The topic of racial identity was discussed among all seven participants in one way or another. With three of the participants (Janet, Sheila, and Jack), the question of how they identify racially was asked directly by the researcher within various discussions of race in other contexts (e.g., children, interactions with others, etc.) In interviews with the other four AAKs (Lela, Vivian, Alicia, and Nora), they reflected on their own identity in response to perceived study focus on the lived experiences of AAKs, comparisons to siblings, requirements to categorize racial identity on documents, and perceptions of racial heritage by others. In all seven interviews, discussion about racial identity appeared to start early in the interview. Negotiations of racial identities were also discussed by participants as they described encounters with race and/or racism and for those individuals with children, interactions within their families.

Participants responded that they identified either as both Black and Korean or simply Black. These identity labels were directly from the participants' mouths as the researcher would generally ask about "identity" or how they identified "racially." Five out of the seven of the AAKs identified as Black and Korean, with only two of the participants (Sheila and Jack) identifying as Black. It is important to note the use of language in the participants' choice of labels. None of the participants chose the term *African American*, instead opting to use the term *Black*, a pattern of self-labeling consistent with older individuals (Sigelman, Tuch, & Martin, 2005). This is an important distinction, as in writing the rationale for this study, I made a conscious choice to use the term *African American* to distinguish between those that are descendents of the African

Diaspora. However, in the context of participants' preferences, I honor the participants by using their own words when reporting study findings.

Racial identification appeared to be influenced by a number of contextual factors such as familial messages and societal feedback. Familial messages from caregivers and other family members about how to view race and how to racially identify was explicitly discussed by six of the seven study participants. Familial influence on racial identity formation can be seen in the lived experiences of both Sheila and Jack, who are siblings that both reported that they identified themselves as Black. Sheila discussed the usefulness of her mom's message to identify as Black and compared her choice of identity to those biracial individuals who don't choose a racial identification at all:

I always identify as Black. Growing up that's what my mom taught us to identify as. I don't know, I think we had a conversation about it once, and she said the reason why she taught us to identify as Black was because she felt like when you look at them, they're Black, and that's what people are going to see. And I think that's fine. Because I don't think I identify as Korean. So I identify as Black. I'm kind of glad she did that, because I've known other bi-racial people who were those "oh, I'm just me" people. I think they have the hardest time coping because they don't know where they fit in.

Jack offered that even though both African American and Korean cultural influences were present in the home, similar to Sheila, he reported that his mom's message was that he was Black:

Even though my mom is Korean and we never learned to speak Korean, but definitely that presence was in the house. We ate Korean food and the whole nine yards. We have the rice cooker with the handle on the side, always a pot of rice. But you know, I definitely identify with being Black. You know, my mom cooked collard greens and fried chicken and all that, and you know she always instilled that in us, that we were Black.

It's clear from these two quotes that the message they received from their Korean mother about who they were racially was powerful and factored heavily into their negotiation of

Black identity. What is also clear from Jack's discussion is how their mother infused both cultures into their home environment through food but not in the Korean language.

The other sibling pair of Alicia and Nora both talked about a seemingly oppositional familial message that was present about race. They both described their experience growing up as "colorless." Alicia explained how this non-socialization to race was different from other African Americans that she knew and shared her first experience with a racialized reality in elementary school:

They [paternal grandparents] didn't really talk about color. My grandmother cleaned houses [for White people] still when she first got us...she had the five of us and she was cleaning this one woman's house in (name of city) on Saturdays. The first time I heard anything about color was from a classmate in school. I've been around Black people where they're always talking about "the man" and they [paternal grandparents] weren't like that. I don't know if it was their belief or their religion. They were eternally optimistic.

Alicia's grandmother cleaned White people's homes for a living, which one could imagine may cause some ill feelings about race relations. Yet she still managed to keep what Alicia described as an "eternally optimistic" view of the world, which Alicia attributed to possibly their deep spirituality.

Nora discussed how she has integrated her grandmother's message into her own identity formation and uses Tiger Woods as an example of honoring all of one's cultures:

I think I really embraced her [paternal grandmother] concept of how you perceive yourself and how others perceive you that there is no color really. It's are you a good human being. I, to this day, don't choose one side or the other. I like both cultures. Food in both cultures, I enjoy the music, the art, the cultures on both sides. I'm part of both of those cultures. I like the philosophy that Tiger Woods had about his Thai mom, I think she's Thai. His relationship and how he perceived himself. I'm neither Black nor Asian, I'm both.

From her perspective, she has a hard time understanding how other AAKs could identify solely as Black. She stated:

I find it surprising that one could be so sure of what their identity is because I feel as a biracial person you don't have allegiance with one side versus the other. I think you owe something to both because you are a part of both cultures.

Nora's sister, Alicia, echoed something similar:

I don't know if that was unique in your group at all but I never really identified myself one way or the other. I wasn't demonstrative enough when someone called me something to make a declaration. That said, my older brother I think he's perfectly fine if no one thought of him anything else but Black.

Alicia's description that she was never "demonstrative enough" points to the idea that race is something that one does versus is (Brunsma, 2006). During her interview, she talked about her older brother finding a place in sports where he was able to foster an identity as a Black athlete within that particular situational context and, as evidenced by the quote above, has continued to see himself as Black.

It is important to note that not all of the participants believed that race was the most salient aspect of their identity. In fact, Vivian shared that she was socialized to see the humanity in all. During the first interview, she discussed how race was not the most important aspect of identity for her. Similar to the experiences of Nora and Alicia, Vivian was taught by her Korean mother to see everyone as the same. Accordingly, Vivian made the point to share:

So, I think one of the things that I consider unique about myself is my race is not salient to who I am. I do cherish my mixed race; I don't identify myself with one or the other. I consider Korean and Black as my race. I want to say that I probably have more exposure to the Black side of my family just because of the non-acceptance of interracial marriage and interracial children [by Korean culture]. But even so, my mom still, it was really important for her to raise me as seeing everyone as the same.

Interestingly, later in the same interview, Vivian added that she is more attuned to identity issues related to her gender (compared to those associated with her race). Specifically, she gave an example involving her workplace:

I think that I am more sensitive to gender than race because when I go into a room, it's easier for me to see women first versus men. When we [Vivian, researcher, & co-workers] were in the room eating lunch [right before this interview], literally it was us women and (name), the guy. That's what I saw. Some people they feel like, okay, so they might have considered you a Black woman, it's two Black women and three White women and then (name of co-worker) who they probably would have considered just Indian. I don't see that, that's never at the top of my mind but I have friends who walk into a room and they immediately notice that they're the only Black person there. I think it's because of the cultural way that I was raised—that I didn't notice that.

“The cultural way that I was raised,” within Vivian’s lived experiences, refers to her family socialization that there is only one race, the human race. In similar ways, Alicia and Nora also pointed to their upbringing as instrumental in shaping their current racial identity. Interestingly, both Alicia and Vivian acknowledged the potential pitfalls of having a more colorblind viewpoint. In particular, Alicia discussed how a colorblind approach to the world might be admirable but not necessarily realistic. During her first interview, she discussed the tension between “the ideal” and what is “real” and used an example of how she used to react to her African American boyfriends who would discuss their experiences with racism:

Let's go forward. I don't want to hear about the poor slave thing you know it's done but then they [African American boyfriends] would start telling me the racist things that would happen to them now. Because I thought White people...the law changed it's over they [White people] don't do that anymore. You know I was naïve so it did backfire! Unfortunately, racism is alive and well!

Alicia elaborated that, having lived on the West coast all of her life, she was not accustomed to the type of racism experienced by many African Americans in the South.



But after an incident where her African American boyfriend (at the time) told her he was called a racial slur while working in a nearby county, she realized that she had been somewhat “naïve.”

During the follow-up interview, I asked Vivian about her thoughts regarding the transcript. During her response, she stated that she has gained an increased awareness of “race relations,” which she attributes to her graduate educational experiences, but this is at times in conflict with her Christian faith and upbringing. Vivian reported learning more about the deep roots of systemic racism and how this has long-term effects for people of color but also discussed experiencing cognitive dissonance:

There are pieces of it that I understand a system has been put into place that creates a systemic disadvantage for people of color. I get that. But the Christian in me says...and a lot of this part of being a Christian is because this is how my mom raised me is you have the power to do what you need to do.

Vivian shared that this is an ongoing process for her and that she has an understanding that people view their sense of power over their lives in different ways.

Within the initial interview, Janet discussed how her parents communicated a similar message to Sheila and Jack’s mother. In essence, she described how—despite her Black and Korean heritage—the world will see her as Black. In Janet’s experience she reported that she has seen that this perspective is pretty accurate: “I think it was actually a good lesson. I’m walking around the street and they’re [bystanders] like oh yeah Black girl.” Throughout both of Janet’s interviews she touched on the importance of acknowledging the history of race relations in the United States when discussing racial identity negotiation for AAKs and biracial individuals in general who have African American as part of their heritage. In particular, she explained:

I think you also have to understand what America is like. I was telling a friend of mine, she's Black and Japanese, and she's someone who kind of gets offended if you were to tell her, "You're Black." Then she's going to correct you and say, "No, I'm mixed or I'm Black and Japanese." And I am not someone who gets offended if someone puts me in the Black box because, honestly, I know when I'm walking down the street, I'm always getting put in the Black box because it's America, so anybody who's kind of brown and has kind of textured hair is going to be thrown in the Black box.

Despite this general social perception, Janet shared how she is more comfortable stating her identity as Black and Korean but resists the term *mixed* as a label that prevents her from crafting an identity that sufficiently describes who she is culturally. Specifically, she shared:

I've always identified as Black and Korean, not mixed. It doesn't roll off my tongue. I don't say, "I'm mixed," because mixed is another group and it's separating you from both and so if someone says something about Black people, it's offensive because I'm a Black woman. If someone says something offensive about Koreans, it's offensive because I'm also a Korean woman. I think it's kind of my identity thing. I'm trying to figure it out, though. I'm not really sure. It's my working theory right now.

Within the context of Janet's comments, it is evident that AAKs' negotiations of racial identities are an ongoing, constant process. This point was captured throughout the initial and follow-up interviews. Interestingly, intrapersonal processing and interpersonal discussions of identity negotiation seemed to be most common as participants faced various racialized encounters and contemplated their role as parents.

All participants in this study reported various situations in which they were confronted with race, and at times racism, which caused them to reflect on their racial identities in explicitly conscious ways. For example, in her first interview, Lela described an incident where she and her African American husband were looking for housing with a group of White friends. Once the realtor (who was White) realized that the housing was

for Lela and her husband, he responded in a way that was discriminatory, which shocked the White friends. Lela explained her frustration with this reaction by many White people when confronted with racism:

The couple was like “what was that about?!” You know like what did he [realtor] mean by that “*for all of you?!*” [in reference to who was looking for housing] They were so offended. I mean I guess it’s that it always tickles me. When somebody (speaking low), a White person or whatever is the minority in a group it just kind of tickles me. I don’t want to make anybody feel awkward or make anybody feel uncomfortable but I think it’s a good experience [for them]. *How many* times have I been the only not just Black face or Korean face but someone of darker pigmentation?

Lela’s frustration appears to be stemming from the realization that for many White people being confronted with overt racism is often a rare occurrence. For her, she has been in numerous situations where she was aware of not only her Blackness but that of being Korean and in general a non-White person.

Sheila described a similar frustration with a lack of racial awareness by White women she has attempted to foster relationships with. She discussed her issue with how some White women have expressed how they view her racially:

We [Sheila and White women] don’t see the world the same way. I think a lot of times what annoys me and why I start to pull myself away is when they [White women] start with that, “You’re not like other Black people, I don’t see you as Black.” And it’s like, okay, you know what, we have a problem. That’s problematic for me because I am Black.

White women’s admission that they do not “see” Sheila as Black was an affront to Sheila’s public and private Black identity, something that African American female communication scholar Marsha Houston (2004) writes about extensively. Sheila described this and their having an overwhelming different worldview as an impediment to her fostering deep relationships with White women in her life.

It was not only encounters with White people that prompted reflection on racial identity negotiation for study participants. Vivian shared that when she first started her current job, she had an African American colleague who inquired what it was like for Vivian to be the only “Black woman” in her department. She shared how this was an issue for her, as the colleague automatically categorized her as Black without acknowledgment of her Korean heritage:

I do have colleagues that work on the other side, in the other office and one of them came up to me shortly after I started and was like, ‘how is it to be the only Black woman working in your office?’ Until that moment in time I’m like—I guess I am the only representation of color. When people assume that I’m just Black that bothers me because I don’t ever want to let that Korean heritage go. So I’m just like, well I’m not only Black, I am Black and Korean. I was like I don’t see how it makes a difference. I said, we all [department] get along together; we all care for each other.

Vivian highlights a couple of dynamics in this quote. One, Vivian acknowledges that until her co-worker said it Vivian had not noticed that she was the only person of color in her department. This appears to be consistent with Vivian’s discussion of being more attuned to gender than race in daily life. She also points to something that has been documented as a common aspect of biracial individuals’ lived experiences—that of conflict between how they define themselves and how others in society define them (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Vivian’s co-worker saw her as Black, and Vivian has consistently seen herself as Black and Korean.

Reflecting on her early lived experiences as an AAK, Janet discussed hearing feedback from other biracial people of African American descent that they had difficulties in their interactions with African Americans. Janet theorized that perhaps her having gone

to a majority African American high school may have been the reason that she has not had the same issues. She stated:

I went to high school in a majority Black school. For me there were too many Black people to have them all be some certain way. I had full Black friends who were sometimes considered to act White. They weren't doing it to me because I'm mixed race, they were just doing it because they were insecure with themselves or some other thing.

Janet is raising a significant issue here in the overall assumption of how African Americans are supposed to act, which, in most cases, translates to not White. This is again another example that was also raised by Alicia when she discussed not being “demonstrative” enough racially, which points to the process of “doing” race and what can happen if the person in question is deemed to not be “doing” race correctly. Janet also articulates her meaning making progress in her interactions with African Americans while observing how her “full Black” friends also negotiated these relationships. Janet concluded that there were multiple processes happening within the African American student body in high school that affected not just her as an AAK but her other African American friends as well. Consistent with existing research (Orbe, 1999), biracial negotiation of racial identities appears to be intensified as they intrapersonally contemplate and interpersonally communicate about race to their children. For participants who are parents (Vivian, Jack, Alicia, and Nora), children appeared to add a different dimension to aspects of their lived experiences.

This was certainly the case for several participants, including Jack. When I asked him about how he would talk to his son about racial identity he stated:

I would just be open with him. Definitely in this day and age it's not uncommon to be multiracial. It's not as taboo as it was for us. Definitely...I don't know. Realistically in my mind, I guess I would teach him to identify with being Black.

It just feels right. You don't definitely deny your White heritage because you are half White, but you know, when we listen to the radio [previously discussed son having affinity for hip hop music]...I think it's [identification with Black culture] just in your blood, maybe.

It appears that Jack has been observing his son and has deduced that he innately feels a connection with Black culture as evidenced by his son's reaction to hip hop music. Jack also has a daughter from a previous relationship with a Dominican woman and in this next quote explains that, due to the darker completion of his daughter's maternal side of the family, she also identifies as Black:

Her grandfather is Dominican and he looks Black. I mean, her mom looks Black—I mean, not—she looks like, let me see who I can compare her to—have you ever seen someone from Brazil? They're really dark skinned but they have fair hair. She looks, I would say she was Brazilian. And it's crazy she [daughter] identifies with Black kids.

What Jack is describing in regard to the racial identity negotiation of his children is the importance of cultural norms (e.g., taste in music) and phenotype (e.g., having darker skin). What is interesting is that with both of his children, he is theorizing that they will identify in ways that are consistent with his own racial identity (Orbe, 1999).

Similar to Jack's experiences, Alicia's negotiation of racial identities was intensified as she adopted and began raising a daughter from China with her husband who is Japanese and White. Alicia shared that she and her husband began to consider adoption after failed attempts with fertility treatments. They were interested in adopting from Holt International, which is an adoption agency that connects families with children from all over the world, including South Korea and China. After finding out that they would not be able to adopt a child from South Korea due to their age (they were too old), they decided to try to adopt a baby girl from China. Alicia shared:

As we started thinking about it, because you have to do a dossier and all that, I'm like this is perfect because we're both half Asian. She can connect with coloring and everything and a lot of people think she's ours. Not that we...we readily say right away but people who don't know us right away they'll say "oh, I thought she was your girl!"

Alicia was and is actively considering in what ways her daughter would be able to feel some commonality with her adoptive parents. Even though there are a total of three Asian ethnicities in their family (Korean, Japanese, and Chinese), people assume that they are a biological family due to perceived common Asian characteristics.

Nora discussed how her sons have asked her questions about her racial identity. In particular, she shared how her oldest son sometimes becomes angry as he questions her lack of "Koreanness":

He gets mad at me because 'mom how come you don't show so much of your Korean background?' It's like when am I going to show that? I have my Korean doll and my little Buddha and I have my hanbok but where am I going to show that? Who do I know? I don't know any African American and Korean people and it's not so easy to throw yourself out there into an all Korean community for them to accept you.

Nora's comments here point to an identity issue implicitly reflected throughout many of the participant interviews: negotiating one's racial identities is more difficult in situational contexts where other similarly-identified individuals are absent. This particular point of analysis is the focus for the second essential theme, absence of an AAK communal group.

#### *Absence of an AAK Communal Group*

The lack of interaction with other individuals with both African American and Korean heritages was quite evident in participants' reactions to the researcher. As I

traveled to meet participants face-to-face for the initial interview, there was the added dimension of what it was like to see another person who shared similar lived experiences and, at times, had similar facial features. This was powerful for both myself and participants and demonstrated the challenges of what it is like to live life without being in regular contact with others who share such an important aspect of your lived experiences.

Janet expressed what it was like to meet another AAK for the first time as an adult:

It was like OH MY GOD! And most of the people that I have met in [name of state], have been Black and Japanese. Yeah, I found that interesting too. Or Chinese, but most were Black and Japanese. So it's like nobody's Korean.

Co-incidentally this other AAK informed Janet about this research study.

There were other stories that were similar from participants who talked about the first time they saw another AAK outside of their family. Alicia details the first time she saw another AAK besides her siblings in a television show about AAKs that had been adopted through Hope Adoption and Family Services International:

The first time I ever saw a Black and Korean person that looked like me or actually a Black and Korean person other than my siblings was that Hope thing. I think I was in high school and it was a TV show about that family and they showed the images of the children they adopted and they could have been any of us.

Both Janet and Alicia's lived experiences of contact with other AAKs highlights how rare it is and how context specific the encounters can be.

This second essential theme that emerged from the data analysis focused on the lack of interaction and contact participants had with other AAKs outside of their family. This particular point of analysis is discussed within this section through three contextual frames: (1) the realities of military life, (2) the desire to compare/contrast AAK experiences, and (3) the heightened visibility of Hines Ward on *Dancing With the Stars*.



*Military life.* For many of the study participants, living on or near a military base heightened the opportunities to interact with other AAKs. However, most reported that the last time they interacted with other AAKs was when they moved away from this particular situational context when they were younger. For some, the transition from military to civilian life was difficult. This was the case for Sheila, who shared what it was like to move from living on military bases her whole life until sixth grade when she transferred to a civilian school:

I hated that school, I'm just now thinking about it. Oh God, I hated living there. It was like, culture shock. Because I was going to a civilian school with these civilian kids who had all grown up together, I think I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. So they'd all started out school together. I hated it. I didn't find them welcoming or very friendly.

The “culture shock” that Sheila alludes to highlights the difference between military and non-military culture—in particular, the idea that military children are often accustomed to their peers moving often, as that is part of military service. Janet also brings this up in discussing her lived experience of being an AAK child in a military family:

It was kind of funny. I was actually talking about this. I think as I grew up, younger years in the military, I was really used to people moving around. That was ok so making friends was no big deal. The funniest thing is being biracial outside of the military. It's much different and I think because we're like...all the Black people I knew when my dad was in the military was actually mixed.

Janet also discussed a stereotype that is common for AAKs and Korean heritage—the idea that the only way that a Black person and Korean person would meet would be within a military context.

Actually I was talking to another Black and Korean friend and she was saying the same thing that she wishes she didn't have to say her father was in the military. And I understand because I think there is another dynamic that whenever you say my dad was in the military, there's a whole world of stereotypes that goes with it. A whole preconceived notions about that so it's kind of like on the more negative

end of the scale, back in the 50s when Korean women who dated Black men were like whores. There's always that undertone to it. And I don't like that. Obviously, they're saying that about my mother. So you know there's always that like, "I wish I didn't have to say all that – that my father was in the military." Then there is the other part that is, "I'm so unique." Actually, it's *not* because there are famous people who are Black and Asian. How are you still shocked about this?

Having lived at least part of their lives in the military is a common thread amongst these seven AAKs. For many within a military context, this is the last time they had contact with other AAKs, but what Janet has brought to light is that this common thread can also be rife with stereotypes about how, why, and how rare it is for African Americans and Koreans to partner. Also, there is the myth that the only way that African Americans and Koreans would partner is through the military, which has the tinge of stigma. There seemed to be a sense of isolation that participants were experiencing due to a lack of a communal AAK group, which leads to the next contextual frame of the desire that participants had of wanting to compare and contrast lived experiences with other AAKs.

*Desire to compare and contrast lived experiences.* It was clear from reactions to news that I was conducting a study on the lived experiences of AAKs, to meeting with study participants, and during follow-up interviews that due to the lack of interaction with other AAKs, these individuals had a desire and in some cases a need to hear other AAK stories. Alicia shared her enthusiasm upon seeing study recruitment information on the Internet:

Oh yeah I was elated because I've had this lifelong pursuit about my people. I guess what I had to go through being mixed, "what are you? What are you?" I sort of internalized, yeah what am I? Of course your parents can't tell you because they're not mixed.

Alicia brings up an important point about how although parents, and we have seen examples of this as discussed earlier, can give their children guidance about racial identity negotiation, they themselves do not have the lived experience of being AAK. This can lead to another layer to the experience of isolation—that of feeling different even within one’s own family. Nora shares her struggle with not fitting in within her paternal extended family:

For me I struggled with that a lot. Not feeling like anybody wanted me to belong anywhere even in my own family. Even the family reunion we’re just so different from the rest of the family and maybe that’s just my hang up. You felt you had to give allegiance to somebody but you felt you were always betraying the other to do so.

Nora also wondered where her story fit on the continuum with other AAKs. This occurred during the portion of the second interview after preliminary collective themes found during the first interviews were shared by the researcher:

I’m always hopeful that people who are biracial like me (Korean and African American) have positive family stories. And then I also wonder were there any of the biracial kids like me that had it worse. Where do I fit in being African American and Korean? Where did my story fit it on the grand scheme of the population, Korean and African American? Are there worse stories than mine? Are there positive stories?

Other participants also appeared to demonstrate a desire to compare and contrast their experiences with others around them. For instance, after a visit with a childhood friend who is White and Korean, Sheila talked about wondering about the possible different experiences of Korean and non-Black families to those of AAKs. This was prompted by her sharing her difficulties growing up and this being the total opposite to her friend’s childhood and adult experiences with her family.

*Hines Ward on Dancing With the Stars.* Interestingly due to the timing of the follow-up interviews, Hines Ward came up as a topic of discussion given his recent stint on a popular network television show, *Dancing With the Stars (DWTS)*. Hines Ward is a running back with the Pittsburgh Steelers and MVP of Superbowl XL. After he won MVP, he gained publicity on a trip to South Korea with his mother and in regard to his foundation that aids orphans, most notably those of African American and Korean descent living in South Korea. He has been credited as sparking conversation in both the U.S. and South Korea about the issue of AAKs. He was most recently on the 11th season of *DWTS* and won in the show's finale.

Given the show's significant ratings and popularity, each celebrity dancer became a frequent topic of discussion among viewers in the U.S. In addition, as individuals continued on in the competition, the show featured background pieces on unique experiences of their lives. For Hines Ward, this included his African American and Korean heritage. Given all of this—and the absence of many AAKs in the public eye—it wasn't surprising that he was a point of discussion in the majority of participant interviews. Alicia commented on the significance of Ward's participation on *DWTS* as a symbol of the change in social zeitgeist around mixed-race individuals. She also reminisces on what it might have been like to have adopted a biracial child:

That football player he's on the dancing thing. So there is a culture, a language...and being mixed is no big deal anymore. There's so many mixed kids or people adopting kids that it's not uncommon. (Name of husband) and I talk about it a lot how nice it is now. I almost wish we were in a situation where we adopted a mixed kid because we could help them. (Name of daughter) is the only pure bred in the house (laughter)!

Nora also discussed Hines Ward. Her comments, however, were within the context of an interaction with a co-worker. Interestingly, this particular person described similarities between Nora's story and Ward's as it was shown in a *DWTS* segment. Nora concludes that, although she is familiar with Ward's cultural background, there needs to be more discussions on the lived experiences of AAKs:

I don't think our story has been fully told. I watch a lot of football that's why I know Hines Ward's story. I think it would do a lot of good. I know that "Alicia" has been on this quest for finding the right hair product, biracial hair or whatever. I think it's a story that hasn't been told.

Nora's reiteration that more opportunities for the collective "story" of AAKs to be told would be beneficial is connected with her comment about Alicia's search for hair products. When put into context with the lack of an AAK communal group, it reflects the limited opportunities to discuss aspects of lived experience such as hair care.

Janet also discussed Ward during the second interview after expressing anger at the myth that South Koreans have a bias against African Americans. This was not her experience when she lived in South Korea teaching English for a year. She discussed her view of South Korea's embracing of Ward's advocacy for the better treatment of AAKs there:

Because if you think about it, that Hines Ward guy, he had to do a lot of work and he's famous, you know, NFL. He goes over there [South Korea] and says, "I'm Black and Korean and I'm this NFL guy and in so many words basically [says] you shouldn't treat people [AAKs this way]...and now Korea has a law that you can be registered in school under your mother's name, you don't have to be under your father's name. Big push on anti-bullying of biracial kids. They've also started drafting biracial boys into the military because they didn't before. So people look at it and it's 2010 or 2011 and they're just now doing it? And I'm like; they've never had to deal with it. They were a homogenous society until 50 years ago and I think actually, 50 years, considering it took the United States 250 years that that's pretty fast.

It is significant that Hines Ward was discussed by so many participants and in a number of different ways. Due to his status as a NFL player, he has used his high profile to publicly discuss his lived experiences as an AAK and his celebrity to advocate for change in how South Koreans in particular view biracial Koreans. There have been numerous discussions of the so-called biracial “experience,” but more often than not it is focused on those who are both African American and White. This leaves out of the discourse those that are AAK, which may explain the fascination with Ward’s lived experience and contributes to the third essential theme that was found amongst the participants, that of being the othered “other.”

#### *Lived Experiences as Othered “Other”*

Along with discussions of racial identity and the lack of an AAK communal group, many study participants expressed the experience of feeling different through terms such as *oddball*, *outcast*, and *visitor*. While it has been well documented that people of multiple heritages are often relegated to the status of “other,” AAKs in this study discussed another level of this phenomenon, that of being the othered “other.” The concept of being the othered “other” is that for some AAKs they were seen as outsiders even within communities that are themselves marginalized. Lived experiences of being the othered “other” will be within the following contexts: being asked “What are you,” there is something about being Black and Asian, and hair stories.

*What are you?* It has been well documented that a common occurrence in the lives of many biracial and multiracial individuals is being asked by strangers “What are you?”

(see, for example, Orbe & Harris, 2008). This theme was also echoed in the stories of many of the participants in this study. What is perhaps slightly different is the issue of being asked that by other biracial individuals and being met with surprise. Janet gives an example:

I go to a group here that is mixed race and actually that's probably been my first experience where people are like "what are you?" Where you don't really get to fit in. That concept is oh Black and Korean but Blacks and Asians don't really mix so how did this really happen? Or they have this concept of what you're supposed to look like if you're Black and Asian. "You don't look..." Yeah but I do.

Janet's retelling of the reaction she received from the members of a mixed-race group exemplifies beautifully the essence of the experience of being the othered "other." Within a context of an othered group (that of those who are also mixed race) she is the other. Her existence is questioned in the assumption that African Americans and Asians do not partner and have children. In addition, her physical appearance of not even meeting the expectations of what an individual of African American and Asian heritage would look like is also a factor.

For Nora, she has felt the experience of the othered "other" in a number of contexts including her own family and, as she explains below, also that of her husband's. In another poignant example, Nora describes the reaction she received while at a funeral for a member of her husband's family. Her presence was so jarring that during this important event the demand to know what her racial background took over:

I remember when I married my husband. I heard that "what is she, what is she, what is she?" Female, American, a human being, the person that married (name of husband) that's what I was thinking. Why is that the topic of discussion? It happened to be a funeral, his grandfather's funeral, it's like "what is she?"

Nora's internal response in this instance is to answer the question of "What is she?" by listing off characteristics of female, American, human being, and the like. This frustration and sense of being appalled at the question being asked was echoed in Jack's description in how he has responded to the "What are you?" question:

Honestly...if your average Joe walked up to me on the street and said, hey ... because I get this question a lot and it's always "what are you?" I'm like, that's a very rude way to ask me, but they're like "what are you?" I'm like, I normally say something smart like, I'm a human being, or I'm a guy, what do you mean what am I? But you know, I tell people I'm Black. And they're like, no you're not Black. I'm like, especially Black people, I'm like, when I put my arm to theirs and I'm like, it's the same but then I'll go like, well my mother's Korean. They'll be like "oh, okay."

Jack reiterates the same experience shared by Janet, Vivian, and Nora in that he has had his identity questioned by those within another marginalized group and has had to "prove" himself to gain entry. This concept of needing to prove the mere existence of who you are that many of the study participants have highlighted seems to perhaps be about the next subtheme, that there is something about being Black and Asian that other mixed-race Asians do not experience.

*There is something about being Black and Asian.* In discussing the experience of being the othered "other," some participants discussed the concept that the experience of being both Black and Asian was quite different from other Asian racial mixes. Alicia stated:

Something unique amongst it being two minorities mixes that maybe an Asian, like my husband, may not quite understand. My husband is a White and Japanese mix but I'm sure there are things that happened to him because he was part Japanese but still not quite as it when it's Black and Asian too.



Alicia acknowledges that being mixed race Asian, Japanese in the case of her husband, may have its challenges, but what she talks about is that there is something about being both Black and Asian that is important to consider. This “something” that is alluded to in Alicia’s quote and those of other AAKs interviewed points to the history of race relations and what it means to be Black in this country, double racial minority status, and the acceptance of Asian as being a model minority close to that of being White—all affect the lived experiences of AAKs.

Janet suggests that it is not only about being African American and Asian, but it is important to consider the particular Asian ethnicity when examining lived experiences. She discusses the cultural richness that gets lost when everyone is categorized broadly as “Asian”:

I think also the other part is being Korean. I think being Black and being pure Asian mixed and Korean is different than being Asian mixed and something. This might just be me and it’s hard for me to say because I don’t know that many other Black and Koreans so I think of my friend, (name). Some of the things that she talks about, you know, is always like in a mixed context and she...this is the thing, you know, like whenever we’re out and she wants to talk about being mixed, she tells people how alike we are being both Black and Asian. But I find us to be very different because she’s Japanese. And I said our cultures are nothing alike.

Janet goes on to talk about the complicated history between Koreans and Japanese that has been present since Japan’s attempt to colonize Korea until the Korean War. This need to distinguish and honor the particular cultures that biracial people represent is one that has been discussed in the academic literature (Gillem et al., 2007), and Janet has provided a real-world example of its importance as well.

It is important to note that not all the participants experience a negative reaction from people who find out about their racial background. Lela shared: “It’s cool to be

Korean and Black you know I mean I've gotten so many compliments like 'oh what a nice mixture'!" Whether experiencing negative or positive reactions from others about their African American and Korean heritages, what is apparent is that reactions are often based on appearance, as evidenced by the previous stories of being told they do not look a prototypical way. For the female participants in the study, stories about hair added to the feeling of the othered "other."

*Hair stories.* All of the women in the study exchanged stories about their hair during the interviews. It is important to note that I too shared my experiences of learning to care for my hair as well. Lela's example of being a young child exemplified the connection between her hair and feeling different from her peers:

There was another instance in that same school, (said name of elementary school). Where I remember seeing there was a difference you know between my hair and someone else's hair because I would often look at their hair and you know when they would be hanging upside down on the monkey bars. I'm like wow their hair just kind of swings in the wind you know and when I hang upside down I still got the same hairstyle you know and it's like nothing's swinging nothing you know!

Lela is giving an example of her meaning-making process of seeing that she is different from her White peers within the context of hair texture. I would also venture that the litmus test of what is "good" hair or not for Lela at this time was if it swung, which it did not. Lela also shared with me her continued struggle with her hair as an adult. During the first interview, Lela pointed to her bathroom with its variety of products, discussed the sleek look being in (which she was trying to achieve with difficulty), and her boyfriend telling her to go to the Dominicans for hair care because they had similar hair texture.

Interestingly, both Lela and Janet discussed their Korean moms seeking help from African American women about caring for their daughters' hair. Specifically, Lela shared:

Yeah so but you know I gotta give it to my mom. She learned how to I mean we learned together but she learned how to put a perm in she asked Black women like “what do you do” you know like at work and stuff.

Similar to Lela’s mom, Janet discussed her Korean mother also asking African American women for hair advice:

Yeah, yeah. For years I stuck with that [braids], then my hair horror stories started. My mom...this is kind of a funny thing that I can say is that she didn’t know but she was never afraid to ask people. That’s kind of the horror stories I also hear from non-Black mothers of mixed race kids. ‘My mom didn’t know what to do with my hair so it was just like this.’ I’m like my mom was vain enough that she was not going to have her child leave the house looking crazy. She didn’t know what Black woman she needed to stalk because she used to do that at the mall and it was really embarrassing. She would just walk around and be like, “excuse me; we really like your hair.” The woman would be like “ok, thanks.” She’s like “tell me how you do that. I need to do her hair.”

Lela and Janet’s mothers asking African American women about how to care for their daughters’ hair shows resourcefulness and attempt to meet their daughters’ needs. There also appears to be some level of understanding that their child was African American and had different hair care needs that, for Janet, she did not see in other non-Black mothers of biracial children. The influence of Korean mothers segues to the fourth essential theme found in the lived experiences of AAKs, reflections on Korean cultural influences.

### *Reflections on Korean Cultural Influences*

Another salient theme that ran across participants’ stories was that of aspects of Korean culture. Korean culture came up in a number of ways, such as tradition of being the eldest daughter, interactions with Koreans, and food.

*Eldest daughter.* Three out of the seven participants reported being the oldest daughter in their family and all discussed two particular Korean traditions and their influence on their lives: (1) how the oldest daughter is to take on certain household responsibilities, and (2) the preferential treatment of sons. Vivian shared:

So my childhood, especially teen years after my brother and sister came, I didn't have a traditional childhood, the open houses and proms, that type deal, because I was more so at home taking care of my brother and sister, which was how my mom was raised, you know, that the older siblings take care of the kids.

In order to further contextualize this quote from Vivian, she shared with me that for a period of time she and her mom had almost a marriage of sorts where Vivian's mother would work and make money and Vivian would take care of the other siblings and household. Vivian points out that this arrangement was similar to how her mom was raised in South Korea, where the older siblings took care of the younger children. Vivian adds another piece that points to the preferential treatment of sons in Korean culture as she talks about her younger brother: "He was the boy and so definitely there's a preference toward boys as part of the Korean culture because they carry on the name."

Sheila recalled a similar childhood as the oldest and, in her case, only daughter:

I'm the oldest and the only daughter. So, my mom is old-fashioned, of the mind that the daughters are for [making into wives]...growing up I remember I had to clean the house, I had to make dinner, I had to do chores, I had to wash dishes. My brothers didn't do anything. But really kind of old-fashioned towards me, like I was saying, she had to train me how to be somebody's wife, and my brothers got to be...what was that saying about Black mothers? I think it applies to Asian mothers—that they raise their daughters but they love their sons. Yeah. I think she babied them for sure because they don't know how to do much.

Sheila is making an interesting connection to traditional gender roles in both Korean and African American culture, where boys are placed in higher esteem and girls are to be groomed for motherhood and domesticity. Vivian added at other points during the

interview of how her mother was still paying for her brother's living expenses as an adult, but she was on her own financially once she left home.

Interestingly, even though Alicia's mother was in and out of her and her siblings' lives, she recalled the same perceived Korean tradition:

We don't have a mom and I don't know if it's because of my [paternal] grandmother's image imprinted on me but I looked around I know my older brother was...he had that classic Korean upbringing he didn't have to do anything. So I just took on this maternal role. (Name of brother) was five years old he needed a mom. I was ten...

Alicia is also talking about the confluence of both African American and Korean cultures in that she felt an obligation to take care of her siblings as influenced by the caretaking of her paternal grandmother. She also saw that her brothers were not expected to contribute as much due to traditional Korean gender norms.

Jack is the only male participant in the study. Given this, it is hard to make many inferences. However, it may be of some significance that Jack described himself as being a "momma's boy" during his initial interview. During my interview with him, I got the sense that he was well taken care of as a child and did not have some of the issues with his parents as his older sister Sheila. It is also important to know that while Jack reported continued contact with their parents, Sheila has been estranged from them for a number of years. Jack, along with the stories from both Vivian and Nora about the treatment of their brothers, gives credence to this traditional gender norm.

*Interactions with Koreans.* Interactions with Koreans, other than family members, sparked reflections on the level of connectedness to Korean culture for some of the participants. Both Alicia and Nora discussed interactions with Korean students that they

work with at their respective universities as providing insight into Korean culture. Alicia shared this experience:

I don't know if I told you this but I hire student workers on campus. Some of them have been Korean and because we're working together we share stories. I don't know if your mother ever did that thing with her thumb where she's peeling your skin off. They call it something. I didn't know that was a Korean thing. I thought that was what my Black grandmother was saying: "you trying to rub the Black off the children?!" That's a Korean way of bathing. I didn't know that.

Alicia was able to connect a practice done by her mother in childhood to an aspect of Korean culture through her interactions with Korean student workers.

Janet shared her experiences with immigrant Korean friends and her surprise at how much more accepted she felt by them than Korean Americans:

It was strange because the first of my Korean friends were actually from Korea not Korean American. I think that's when I probably went through my more, I don't know where I kind of fit into this community. For some reason it was easier to relate with foreign Koreans than it was for Korean Americans. The weird thing is I felt like they accepted more that I was Korean than Korean Americans did.

Again, context is important to fully understand the weight of Janet's quote. There is often conflict between international Koreans and Korean Americans in regard to who is really Korean, with the issues of high rate of assimilation for Korean Americans being a focus. Transracial adoptees added to this mix create an interesting milieu for AAKs. Janet has also had lived experience with interacting with Korean transracial adoptees in high school:

The older I got and the more that I kind of learned about especially Korean transracial adoptees that I'm like well they were probably going through their own issues that they really didn't want to deal with the Koreanness. Sometimes even though they knew I was mixed it was something that they really didn't want to deal with. It was kind of weird because I wasn't close to any of them but I noticed every time they would talk to me they would say "so..." They would try to get the inside into Korean. I'm like ok (laughter). Once I remembered this girl asking me

in the locker room [at school] how to make kimchee. I was like I have no idea. Do you know how long it takes? You can buy it (laughter)!

The fact that this Korean transracial adoptee inquired about kimchee points to the importance of food as a connection to culture.

*Food.* A number of participants discussed eating Korean food as a way of connecting with Korean culture. Before interviews with Vivian, Alicia, and Nora, Korean food was shared with the researcher as a way of connecting to our shared Korean heritage. Lela's mom gave me kimchee to take to my mom who was nearby. Jack shared that his mom cooked both traditional Korean and African American food at home.

Nora discussed cooking traditional Korean food for her family as a way to maintain a connection to Korean culture for her children in light of the lack of interaction with Nora's maternal side of the family:

His [youngest son] dad's side of the family or I but you don't see the Korean side. The Korean side is 3000 some odd miles away. So I try to bring that home to him in the cooking that I do. I have a lot of Asian recipes. Not just Korean but Filipino and Vietnamese. I try to bring that flare in my cooking because I like cooking like that! I'm the only one. "Alicia," she can cook now but I was the only one paying attention with my African American grandmother and my mother when I was always in the kitchen.

While food was a common denominator in regard to connection to Korean culture amongst the seven AAKs, fluency of the Korean language was not. None of the participants reported learning to speak Korean fluently from their mothers. Not being able to communicate with members of a cultural group in the native language spoken has serious ramifications in whether or not an individual has entry into the group. Lela shared her wish that her father had taken the family with him when he was stationed in Korea

and how she feels about her mom not teaching the children to speak Korean. Referring to her family traveling to Korea with her dad, she shared:

That would have been great if I had gotten some experience with you know my heritage. The other half of my heritage it really would have been but I mean I've never said anything like that to [my dad] like oh "why didn't you." I never questioned the way that they raised us or their choices or anything. With my mom you know I did kind of blame her for us not speaking Korean.

Lela yearned to have more of a direct connection to her Korean heritage, which could have been fostered by living in Korea with her father when he was stationed there and by learning to speak Korean. It is interesting to ponder why none of the seven AAKs were taught to speak Korean at home. When this is put into context with Korean mothers telling their children that society will see them as African American and this being the reality for many of the participants, the predominance of relationships with African American partners does not come as a surprise.

#### *Relationships with African American Partners*

In gathering participants' life histories, relationships emerged as an important theme. A common thread amongst, interestingly, the female participants was in the category of dating. All of the women discussed dating at one time primarily African American male partners. Several reasons were given for this, such as opportunities due to racial makeup of social circles and being approached more by these men. Vivian and Nora discussed not having an extensive dating history but coincidentally are both married to African American men. In Nora's case, she is in her second marriage to an African American partner.



Availability of dating partners within one's social circle or neighborhood environment was discussed by several participants in their reflections of dating primarily African American partners. Janet shared this response to probes about her dating experiences:

Well I guess on a racial aspect, I mostly well only date Black men. I don't know if there is any rhyme or reason or if that's just been the opportunity. Or that is just the way my social groups that I hang out with or just kind of I don't know or just the way it happens.

Alicia explained that, due to living in what she described as a predominantly African American neighborhood, she had more encounters with African American men. However, she does wonder about the lack of being approached by men of other races:

Because I grew up in the quote "hood" those were the type of people that I would actually accept invitations to ask me out more often. But looking back there were plenty of non- Black guys that probably would have never said anything to me that I think I was more attracted to. If that makes any sense.

Lela's experiences with non-African American men, in particular White men, highlighted for her a lack of a shared language when it came to dating. She explained:

I think with Black guys you know, from my experience, it's like there was an understanding. When they were talking to me they were trying to get with me you know. But with White guys, I don't know the language. I don't know are you being nice to me or are you being *nice* (change of tone to signify romantic attraction) you know what I mean?

Lela discussed that it is this lack of being able to decipher the implicit interest White men may have in dating her that influences her decision to date primarily African American men.

Both Alicia and Sheila discussed, whereas they had dated Black men primarily in the past, they felt that they were more attracted to men of other ethnicities. Sheila explained:

I don't remember having any little Black boys, thinking Oh, I like "Antonio"... Although "Antonio" liked me, I just never had that. I don't know, I was never interested, although I did date mostly Black guys when I was in the Navy. And I think it was peer pressure from my Black friends. I had one Black friend; she was from (state). She had a really narrow worldview. I remember I became friends with this White guy and he had invited me over, he was divorced, he's an older guy, and we were just friends. I was not interested in this guy, he was not somebody I would date. I didn't think he was attractive, but I liked him as a person. And he had invited me over, he was going to make dinner, and he had his kids, and so it wasn't like it was a date, I didn't view it as a date. He didn't present it as a date...come over and I'll make you dinner." So I was telling her [friend] and she kind of lambasted me over it, about dating a White guy. It was kind of like oooh I'm being judged here.

Sheila is discussing several meaning-making processes here. First, she details the realization from an early age that, while African American males were interested in her, she was not as attracted to them. Second, she dated primarily African American partners while in the Navy (she explained earlier in the interview that she did not date until then) mainly due to what she describes as peer pressure from other African Americans. She found out, after revealing she was to have dinner with a White male, that there were boundaries around whom she was able to couple with in the eyes of her African American female friend. Sheila shared that her first husband while in the Navy was Mexican and she is now married to a White man.

Interestingly, Sheila's brother Jack shared his experiences dating Black women:

And I know it's funny because my sister's married to a White guy and I'm married to a White woman. But it wasn't the situation to where I only dated White girls or anything like that. I mean I definitely ran the gamut of cultural diversity with women. It just happened like that. That's just who I identify with. And honestly and truthfully, Black women don't like me. Like the one—I mean, I have dated fine Black women, but that's only far and few in between. Like when I tried to get at Black women, they weren't interested. It's weird. I promise. I don't know. Or the ones that liked me wasn't what I was looking for. You know it would be that situation. I don't know. I don't know. Honestly, some—and not trying to be biased...to an extent...the majority of Black women that I have encountered with

that I tried to get at or whatever, they had different agendas then, like a White girl or a Spanish girl or whatever.

The “agendas” that Jack mentions is what he later explained was wanting him to have a certain amount of money. He discussed that his current wife was willing to accept his just getting out of the military with limited resources, yet the African American women he encountered were not.

It is important to add some context to both Sheila and Jack’s disclosures that they were not attracted to African American partners and feel more identified with White partners (respectively). During his initial interview, Jack discussed his mom’s bias towards Black women within the context of his answer to the researcher’s question about any familial messages received about acceptable dating partners. Specifically he shared:

No. No, they were really open to whatever you like. Whatever you like if she’s a decent girl, we’re going to like her because my mom was Christian. My dad is a hard-core Christian now. But you know, my mom was like—they would always [say] how can we tell you to only date Black women when your mom’s not Black. So they were just very open. I can’t lie; my mom had a little bias towards Black women. The reason for that is when, you know, her being Korean and first coming to the United States, definitely this is the 60s, Jim Crow, and a lot of Black women, especially members of our family, you know, my dad’s family, would like give her a hard time. So you know, my mom, I guess she was scarred by this. They weren’t very accepting of her. My mom has this bias towards Black women. [Researcher] What does she say about Black women? [Jack] They’re loud.... I don’t know, she just says they’re not very cordial.

It is acceptable to consider that, due to Sheila and Jack’s mom’s message that they were to identify as Black, which was influential in their racial negotiation of a Black identity, mom’s bias towards African American women may have also influenced their eventual choices in White spouses. What is also interesting and reveals the complexity of racial identification for AAKs, is Sheila’s mom’s message to her that she is a Black woman, juxtaposed with mom’s bias and previous negative experiences with Black women.

## Summary

This chapter detailed the results of the phenomenological data reduction process of interviews conducted with seven AAKs living in various regions of the United States gathering descriptions of their lived experiences. What emerged from careful data analysis were five essential themes that were salient in their lives. These themes were: (1) Negotiation of Racial Identity(ies), (2) Absence of AAK Communal Group, (3) Lived Experience as the Othered “Other,” (4) Reflections of Korean Cultural Influences, and (5) Relationships with African American Partners.

In discussion of these essential themes, important contextual frames were used to deepen the meaning of each of the five salient aspects of lived experience. Within the theme of Negotiation of Racial Identity(ies), the following was found to enhance understanding of the identity negotiation process for AAKs: (1) encounters with race and racism, and (2) influence of raising children. The second theme of Absence of Communal AAK Group was examined within the following contextual frames: (1) realities of military life, (2) the desire to compare/contrast AAK experiences, and (3) the heightened visibility of Hines Ward on *DWTS*. The Lived Experience of being the Othered “Other” was the third essential theme that emerged from the data and was expressed through the following subthemes: (1) What are you? (2) there is something about being Black and Asian, and (3) hair stories. The fourth salient theme was Reflections on Korean Cultural Influences and data analysis of this theme discovered the following subthemes: (1) eldest daughter, (2) interactions with Koreans, and (3) food. The final essential theme of AAK lived experience was Relationships with African American Partners. While no specific

subthemes were outlined in this section for the fifth theme, connections to the other four essential themes and the respective contextual frames were found through participants' narratives. These included such things as the influence of racial identity, encounters with race, and experience of being the othered "other" as all being connected to dating partner choices.

Chapter V will expand on these essential themes further in an effort to present a narrative on the collective story of AAK lived experiences within the context of the academic and mainstream literature. This will allow for more in-depth discussion of important cultural and socio-political contexts that no doubt influence the lived experiences of these individuals.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is multifold. It serves as a place to focus on how the results presented in the previous chapter provide insight into the four research questions posed, as well as how the results support or add to the existing literature. Implications for clinical practice and future research are also discussed. Strengths and limitations of the study are presented, and then I will provide a conclusion.

#### Brief Summary of Results

After careful data analysis, five essential themes emerged from the lived experiences of the seven AAKs interviewed. The themes were as follows: (1) Negotiation of Racial Identity(ies), (2) Absence of AAK Communal Group, (3) Lived Experiences as Othered “Other,” (4) Reflections of Korean Cultural Influences, and (5) Relationships with African American Partners.

Four out of the five essential themes had associated subthemes that provided important context. The first essential theme of negotiation of racial identity(ies) was framed within the contexts of encounters of race and racism, and for the five participants who were parents, the influence of raising children. The second theme of the absence of an AAK communal group had realities of military life, the desire to compare/contrast AAK experiences, and the heightened visibility of Hines Ward on *DWTS* as associated

subthemes. The third theme of experiences as othered “other” yielded descriptions of participants being asked the question “What are you,” implications that there is something about being Black and Asian, and stories about hair as subthemes. Reflections of Korean cultural influences were the fourth theme with experiences as the eldest daughter, interactions with Koreans, and food serving as contextual frames. As mentioned in the previous chapter, while the fifth essential study theme of relationships with African American partners had no specific subthemes, the influence of many of the aforementioned essential themes and contextual factors were present. The following section will situate these results within the context of this study’s research questions and within the landscape of existing literature. I will be explicit in highlighting where these results support or add to existing scholarship.

#### Addressing the Four Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of adults with Korean and African American heritages. The four main research questions were:

1. How does a small group of AAK adults living in the U.S. go about making their way through life?
2. What issues arise for these AAK adults?
3. How do they face the challenging situations they meet?
4. What suggestions do they have for other AAK individuals and those encountering them?

The next four sections draw from the thematic insights explicated in Chapter IV and explore ways in which they provide insight into these research questions. In addition, I utilize these sections to highlight the ways in which the data supports, extends, and/or challenges existing research.

*Research Question 1*

*How does a small group of AAK adults living in the U.S. go about making their way through life?*

This question was approached by semi-structuring the initial interviews through questions about 10 specific life domains (self, family, residential, romance, spirituality, social/political, leisure, education, relationships, and career). This approach was chosen specifically to get a more holistic view of the participants' lives and to acknowledge the dimensions of personhood that exists in each individual. Some researchers have criticized the way that biracial populations have been studied, due to the direct questions asked about racial identity and categorization as actually feeding into faulty notions of race (Spencer, 1999). For example, Spencer suggested that researchers should not assume that "personal identity need to be race based to begin with" (p. 89). I wanted to inquire generally about the participants' lives and allow race and identity to emerge within their own narratives, if at all.

This research question is an overarching one that frames this entire study. The study participants are not so different from anyone else in that they had to make their way through life and the trials and tribulations that come with it based on family of origin and other circumstances. What is important to the phenomenon being studied here is that their



African American and Korean heritages made for some unique challenges and triumphs not experienced by those who are not AAK.

While there have been a limited number of studies that have included a small number of AAKs (see Gaskins, 1999; Root, 2001a; Williams & Thornton, 1998), the current investigation is the first to study exclusively the lived experiences of this cultural group. Study results illuminated several meaning-making processes that the AAKs utilized. These processes were negotiation of racial identity(ies), reflections on Korean cultural influences, and partner choice.

Tatum (1997) discussed that the process of identity development often begins with the question “Who am I?” and is “shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts” (p. 18). All of these contextual factors could be seen in the narratives of AAKs about their process of negotiating racial identity(ies). As mentioned earlier, the intention of this study was to allow for the level of saliency of racial identity(ies) in each participant’s life to be discussed organically during the interviews. Interestingly, in interviews with all seven AAKs, racial identity came up within various contexts and early on in the interview, which points to the importance of this meaning-making process in their lives, whether they wanted it to be or not. The present study, with its holistic framework, allowed for the role of racial identity(ies) negotiation to appear on its own. This natural unfolding of what was relevant in the lives of AAKs is at the core of what qualitative research is about, putting aside predetermined agendas so that participants can direct what is discussed.

For the participants in this current study, negotiation of racial identity(ies) was found to be influenced by the contextual frame of encounters with race and racism. This

is a common theme that has emerged in other studies of biracial persons' negotiations of racial identity. For example, Miville, Constantine, Baysden, and So-Lloyd (2005), in their study of a diverse group of 10 biracial persons, found that encounters with race and racism illuminated awareness of group membership and that being biracial is often seen as being different. Williams and Thornton (1998), in the only published study to date that exclusively explored the racial identity development of a diverse group of Afroasians (two of which were identified as AAK), found that participants reported "racial moments" where the racial identity of the participants was called into question or assumed. These encounters with race and racism as influencing the racial negotiation process for the AAKs in the present study and other persons of multiple heritages highlight the task of having to make sense of how other people see them racially into their own sense of self.

This task has been studied in the biracial literature primarily by sociologists (see, for example, Khanna, 2004) using the framework of Cooley's (1902) theory of reflected appraisal, also known as the "looking glass self." Cooley theorized that people tend to form their view of self from messages they receive about themselves from others. The lived experience of being told by parents that they would be seen as Black influenced highly the racial identity choice of "Black" for two out of the seven AAKs in this study. Although one additional participant also received this message, she chose to identify herself as Black and Korean. She stated that, in her interactions with society, Black is how she is perceived; and was not offended if someone chooses to identify her as such. However, her identity was Black and Korean.

Another popular theory used to explain how perception of others influences the racial identity negotiation process is the theory of symbolic interactionism. Rockquemore

and Brunnsma (2002) stated that this theory explains the “microlevel negotiations between actors as the terrain in which identities are either affirmed or negated. Identities, as validated self-understandings, depend on confirmation from others to be developed and maintained by individuals” (p. 23). Symbolic interactionism is also aligned with Williams’ (1995) discussion of the “theatre of identity” and the idea that race is not something that is, but rather something that is done (Brunnsma, 2006). This can be seen in Alicia’s discussion of not being “demonstrative” enough to be declared either Black or Korean when she was younger.

Nowhere has the idea of the rules of racial performance been more striking than in the social construction of Blackness. The lived experiences of AAKs add to this discourse. Some of the AAKs discussed looking to music, skin color, and other symbols to indicate levels of Blackness. Harris and Khanna (2010) found within their study of middle-class African Americans and African American/White biracial individuals that participants had themselves a “narrow” (p. 641) view of what it meant to be Black. Touré (2011), in his mainstream book, *Who’s Afraid of Post-Blackness: What It Means to Be Black Now*, declared:

We are in a post-Black era, which means simply that the definitions and boundaries of Blackness are expanding in forty million directions—or really, into infinity. It does not mean we are leaving Blackness behind, it means we’re leaving behind the vision of Blackness as something narrowly definable and we’re embracing every conception of Blackness as legitimate. (p. 12)

Who is and who isn’t deemed Black or Black enough has been an area of discussion in the lives of biracial persons of African American descent and leads to the issue of the lingering effects of rules of hypodescent.

Research on adherence to rules of hypodescent amongst mixed-race individuals with African American heritage has focused predominantly on those who are both Black and White. In their review of the literature, Rockquemore, Brunnsma, and Delgado (2009) found that amongst individuals who are Black/White, they are not necessarily always adhering to the one-drop rule or consistently identifying as Black. This is also apparent in the current study, but without further research on AAKs specifically and in general biracial persons of African American descent and other communities of color, it is difficult to make comparisons. What is clear is that the lived experiences of AAKs adds to the discussion on post-Blackness and will continue to do so.

While the current study is the first on the lived experiences of AAKs, Standen (1996) conducted the first on WKAs. Since the first research question asked about the ways in which AAKs go about making their way through life, it is important to compare the stories of AAKs in the current study with the WKAs in Standen's investigation. This seems of particular interest since an important subtheme that emerged for AAKs was the implication that there was something that distinguished being both Black and Asian from White and Asian. Just like the current study, except for African American fathers, all of the participants' mothers in Standen's study were Korean immigrants and their fathers identified as White. Similarities found within both groups of participants were the experience of being asked "What are you?" and lack of Korean language fluency. Interestingly, Standen found fluidity in participants' responses to identifying themselves racially in which they were allowed to choose racial identities depending on the context. This is in contrast to the AAKs in the present study, where many discussed familial

messages about how to identify based on how society will see them and automatic categorization, which may take away some fluidity.

### *Research Question 2*

#### *What issues arise for these AAK adults?*

Issues affecting the lives of individuals of multiple heritages have been a main focus of academic literature and popular culture. Much of the research has focused on challenges pertaining to negotiation of racial identity (Edwards & Pedrotti, 2008; Rockquemore et al., 2009; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). One of the essential themes of the present study was negotiation of racial identity(ies), and several issues emerged in the AAKs' narratives that mirror what has been documented in previous research.

Shih and Sanchez (2005), in their review of multiracial identity development literature, detailed a number of common challenges that multiracial individuals face during their racial identity development (see Chapter II for more information). Several of these challenges were present in the narratives of the participants in this study. Having to “justify identity choices” (p. 572) is one of those challenges. Shih and Sanchez provide an example of a monoracial Asian who self-identifies as Asian rarely being faced with questions about his identity choice, but someone of Asian and White descent may very well be faced with having to explain her/his choice to identify as Asian and may have her/his membership in the group questioned. This is similar to what Jack described when he discussed identifying as Black and having African Americans question this and his placing his arms up to theirs to compare skin color as a way to confirm group membership. “Conflict between private and public definitions” (p. 572) was also seen in

the negotiation of racial identity process for some in this study. For example, Vivian detailed how she was labeled as Black by an African American co-worker and subsequently Vivian informed this co-worker that she was also Korean.

Alicia, Nora, and Vivian shared how they were raised with a colorblind view of race and how they had to learn about race in some difficult ways outside of home. This is similar to the challenge of “conflicting messages” that Shih and Sanchez (2005) stated many biracial children get about race from caregivers. They found that when race is downplayed within the home environment, many biracial children and adolescents learn about racial conflict through society at large. This can be seen in descriptions from Alicia and Vivian about learning about the saliency of race for many other African Americans. Messages about race from caregivers point to the importance of familial influence in the negotiation of racial identity(ies) of the AAKs. Both Root (2001a) and Jourdan (2006) found that familial messages about race could be both a positive and/or negative factor in the racial identity process.

The influence of family and encounters with race outside of the family in the racial identity(ies) negotiation process for the AAKs in this study confirms that there is commonality in the assertion that context matters in the identity process of biracial persons (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Due to its focus on contextual factors, it may be helpful to situate the racial identity development of the AAKs within an ecological framework. The ecological approach has the following assumptions: (a) biracial persons negotiate various racial identities based on various contextual factors; (b) the process is not linear, no endpoint is deemed better than another; (c) there are no predictable stages of identity development; (4) the idea that one type of racial identity choice is better than

another only adds to essentialism that is embedded in earlier models; and (5) it is possible to choose to not identify racially at all (Rockquemore et al., 2009). This contextually based approach appears to fit well for the racial identity negotiation process of the AAKs in this study. It is unique in that it even acknowledges the experience of one of the participants, who discussed race as not as salient as gender to her sense of self.

Due to many biracial individuals' so-called racially ambiguous appearance and society's need to categorize, many have reported the experience of being asked "What are you?" This issue emerged as a subtheme within the narratives of participants in the current study as well. What stands out from the literature is that some AAKs in this study also shared that this has been inquired of them by not only monoracial persons but biracial persons as well. Study participants discussed an underlying message that the presence of an individual who was of African American and Korean descent was incredibly rare and an anomaly due to the idea that members of two such culturally and socially distant groups do not mix, so to speak. A major contribution this study adds to existing scholarship is description of the lived experience of being the othered "other."

The experience of being put into the position of the othered "other" has been echoed in the small number of studies that have included narratives from AAKs. Gaskins (1999) included the narrative of an AAK woman in her gathering of stories from young biracial adults. This AAK woman shared an experience of asserting that there were also those who were Black and Korean during a discussion in a Korean language class and being met with surprise and disdain from both the instructor and a Korean woman in the class. Another AAK woman in Williams and Thornton's (1998) study shared experiencing pity from others about being both African American and Korean because

these are two groups who experience a great deal of tension and how difficult this must be for her. What all of the collective experiences highlight is a lack of understanding of the lived experiences from the persons who are a part of these two groups. The present study is a step in helping AAKs to voice their own personal experiences and not have them be assumed.

The absence of an AAK communal group was another essential theme and issue that arose during participant interviews. Participants shared limited, if any, interaction with other AAKs outside of their siblings until meeting with this researcher. Sanchez and Garcia (2009) stated that, due to population size, biracial persons may have difficulty finding others who share their same racial background. This may lead to a lack of role models, which may make it difficult in learning how to navigate racial identity development (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The experiences with having to learn how to care for their differently textured hair from others in their family is a practical example of the difficulty of not having role models seen in the narratives of AAKs. An important contextual frame that was discussed by some AAKs for this issue of a lack of community was the difficult transition from military to civilian life. The diversity of a military community where there were more AAKs to interact with was a stark difference to more segregated civilian contexts where, according to one study participant, to be biracial was to be Black and White. This mirrored what Thornton (1983) found in his sample of BJAs. Ninety percent of BJAs who spent a significant amount of their upbringing within the military had difficulties in civilian contexts. What emerged from the participants' narratives was, while the military provided a more communal context, there is also a stigma present in the myth that the only way that Koreans and African Americans partner



is through the military. Accompanying this myth is the underlying assumption that the Korean women involved are less desirable. This tension between lived experience and stereotype is another factor of how AAKs are put in the position of the othered “other.”

All seven of the participants discussed the choice of African American partners when discussing the domain of romantic relationships. At the time of the study, three out of the seven AAKs were currently in relationships with partners who were identified as White and White/Japanese. Sheila and Alicia are two of those participants, and both shared the reflection that they have always been more attracted to White men but did not always feel like they were able to date them due to lack of being approached by White men or receiving messages from their African American peers that it was not acceptable. This was similar to the Afroasian women in Root’s (2001a) study that reported experiencing White men as less accessible to them as dating partners and that overall they felt less power in dating partner choice. Root also found that in her study the Afroasian women assumed that Black men would choose a number of different types of women (e.g., monoracially Black, Black/White, and so on) before choosing them. This particular finding was not expressed by the female AAKs in this study; in fact, a number of the women discussed feeling more desired by Black men due to their physical appearance which, for some, particularly in adolescence, caused a problem with monoracial Black women. Funderburg (1994) found this also to be the case for some of the Black/White biracial persons she interviewed and theorized the historical nature of what is considered desirable in terms of appearance (e.g., lighter skin, texture of hair, etc.). Twine (1996) found that choice of dating partners played a key role in management of racial identity for the biracial persons of African American descent she interviewed. However, this was not

as clear for the AAKs in the present study. The primary reasons given for the frequency of dating African American partners was that of proximity (demographics of neighborhood) and racial makeup of social group.

Interestingly, the two study participants (Sheila and Jack) who identified themselves as Black were both married to White spouses. Funderberg (1994) and Roberts-Clarke, Roberts, and Morokoff (2004) found that biracial persons were more open to interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds, which may or may not have been a factor in the participants' dating choices. This was not explored further in the present study. While gathering the stories of AAKs for this study, it was clear to me that, although they faced obstacles in their lives, they also found ways to make their way in the world with little role modeling, as was discussed previously.

#### *Research Questions 3 and 4*

*How do they face the challenging situations they meet?*

*What suggestions do they have for other AAK individuals and those encountering them?*

Research questions 3 and 4 will be discussed together in order to provide insight into what AAKs did to face the challenges they were presented with and how it reflects what they may suggest to others. Several of the study results that help to provide insight into these two questions are the participants' reflections on Korean cultural influences, the meaning of the visibility of Hines Ward, and desire to compare and contrast personal experiences with other AAKs.

Aspects of Korean culture came up in a myriad of ways in the narratives of all seven of the study participants. In particular, interactions with Koreans other than family members were discussed within the context of connection to Korean culture. All of the AAKs appeared to embrace Korean culture as much as they could. All of the participants, except for the sibling pair of Alicia and Nora, had their Korean mother as a constant in their lives and discussed her as a conduit to the culture. Amazingly, although Alicia and Nora's mother was not consistently present, they both had actively sought out ways to learn more about this part of their culture. They both discussed sharing stories with Korean students that they worked with as well as eating and cooking Korean food. The importance of knowing cultural traditions and customs influencing sense of belonging has also been found by other researchers studying mixed-race Asian groups (Khanna, 2004; Standen, 1996). Food as a link to culture was also found to be the case in Hall's (1980) study of BJAs.

Due to the dominance of the experiences of persons of Black and White heritages in the larger discourse of biracial experience, the inclusion of Hines Ward in the narratives of AAKs was not a surprise. Ward has become living proof that persons of African American and Korean heritages do exist, and commonalities within his stories to those of the study participants served as a validation of their lived experience. Several study participants also discussed his philanthropic efforts to help those of Black and Korean descent living in South Korea as important. There was also caution that was expressed as Nora prominently stated that his is only one voice and that the entire AAK story has yet to be told.

Many of the AAKs that I interviewed expressed the importance of adding their lived experiences to this study and the desire to hear those of others with the same cultural background. Nora shared the desire to see where she fell on the continuum of AAK lived experiences, and Alicia stated that study participation was a stop on her quest to learn more about herself as a woman of multiple heritages. There was a sense that I felt from all of the interviews that, even though the lived experiences of AAKs were not always acknowledged or even respected in interactions with others, this in no way meant that their stories were not important.

I note that the inclusion of a research question inquiring about challenges associated with lived experiences of AAKs without a question about potential benefits could be perceived as adding to a deficits perspective on the lived experiences of those with multiple heritages. However, I think the perspective of Thornton and Williams (1998) in their distinction between “marginal status versus marginal personalities” (p. 260) is important to consider. They stated that “there is clearly a difference between occupying a position of a marginal person (e.g., a racial minority)—in other words, experiencing marginality—and exhibiting the characteristics of a psychologically marginal person” (p. 260). This is important to remember in the review of both the challenges and triumphs that emerged from the stories of AAKs. There is strength in being able to find a way to build a sense of self and identity while simultaneously existing in a world that does not always know where to put you.

## Implications for Clinical Practice and Future Research

### *Clinical Practice*

There are a number of implications for clinical practice that can be gleaned from the current exploration of the lived experiences of AAK adults. An essential theme that emerged from participants' narratives was the phenomenon of being placed as the othered "other." This encompassed reactions from others about their existence, which over the course of time could take a psychological toll. While being relegated to the position of other has been discussed extensively by other researchers, what is different for AAKs is the phenomenon of being yet again marginalized within an already marginalized group. Clinicians should be aware that being of mixed-race ancestry does not predetermine that individuals will have issues related to psychological adjustment (Shih & Sanchez, 2005), but as we have seen, constant questioning of how one chooses to be in the world could begin to take a psychological toll.

Related to the issue of being the othered "other" for AAKs is the implication of experiencing both interracial and interethnic microaggressions. Sue et al. (2007) defined racial microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color" (p. 271). Sue et al. (2007) pointed out that people of color can experience these microaggressions from both White and other communities of color. For AAKs this is true and could be compounded when their experiences are not validated by any number of groups.

An important finding of this study was the influence of family on the racial identity(ies) negotiation process. It is important when working with AAKs to inquire about and understand the family context and any messages that they might have received about race or other aspects of identity. Jourdan (2006) found that clinicians have limited resources that focus specifically on the needs of biracial persons but advocated that genograms may be “an effective tool because they provide multiethnic individuals with a context to understand their personal experiences within their family” (Jourdan, 2006, p. 339).

Allowing for complexity in the human experience is important when working with AAKs. Striking a delicate balance between the knowledge that race is a social construct and that race indeed does matter in this country is an important worldview to foster. Clinical practice and training does not happen in a vacuum. Assumptions and biases about the coupling of African Americans and Koreans need to be examined and acknowledged. It is of the utmost importance that the experience of the othered “other” is not replicated in clinical practice. Salahuddin and O’Brien (2011) stated that due to the emphasis on multiculturalism and use of strength based approaches, counseling psychologists are “poised to advance knowledge regarding multiracial individuals, an understudied and rapidly growing population” (p. 504).

### *Future Research*

Due to this investigation being the first to empirically study the lived experiences of a group of AAK adults living in the U.S., the possibilities of future research are rich and only a few will be discussed here. An area of future research is the further study of

AAK males specifically. The present study had an overwhelmingly female demographic, which made it difficult to make comparisons based on gender. The one place that gender came up explicitly was in the experience of eldest daughters and Korean traditional gender roles. It would be interesting to explore how AAK males raised with a Korean parent experienced gender role socialization. Root (2001a) discussed how Black male stereotypes are a reality for biracial males with African American ancestry. A larger sample of AAK male study participants would be able to explore this phenomenon and a larger scope of any gender differences in identity negotiation for AAKs.

A second area for future research is focus on Korean mothers raising AAKs. An interesting finding within this study was the report that Korean mothers sent messages to their AAK children that they were either Black or one in which race was downplayed. None of the participants reported being raised to identify as predominantly Korean. This, along with data that none of the participants learned to speak fluent Korean at home, begs the question of how do Korean mothers of AAKs view their children's racial identity(ies) and what does this mean about the mother's own sense of identity?

Young (2009) found in her (auto)ethnography of hybrid identities within her mother–daughter relationship that her mother viewed her Korean ethnic identity as different from other Koreans. This was due to limited contact with a Korean community and living in a predominantly White neighborhood in the Midwest. Previous research on Korean Americans had found that, regardless of time here in the U.S., they tend to maintain a high level of Korean ethnic identity (Chang, 2007). Another layer of this research area would be the level of assimilation and acculturation amongst Korean

mothers who are immigrants, first generation, transracially adopted, and so forth. These important demographic factors would need to be explicitly discussed.

A third area for potential research study is to explore the lived experiences of AAKs who are living in South Korea. Lee (2009) posited that the “otherness” (p. 56) of mixed-race Koreans living in South Korea is rooted in the importance of family being tied to nationalism, race, and gender bias. Janet, the only study participant to have lived in South Korea, also alluded to this in her narrative. Lee also discussed the resentment by mixed-race Koreans living in South Korea about the publicity surrounding Hines Ward as an AAK. This is different from how he was discussed by the AAKs in this study, which points to a different cultural and socio-political climate for mixed race Koreans in the U.S. and in South Korea.

Many of the current study participants remarked about the changing social zeitgeist surrounding AAKs who were born in the 1960s and 1970s and those born in the 1980s and 1990s. This has not been investigated and would be an exciting area of future research. Root (2001a) found that amongst her younger participants, a higher number had fathers who were Asian. Along with possible generational differences, lived experiences of being an AAK with a Korean father and African American mother would be of interest as well as AAKs without a parent who was in the military.

Rockquemore et al. (2009) present three challenges to the construction of theory and overall research with biracial populations: historical limits of knowledge production, lack of interdisciplinary conversation, and the need to work on theories that not only explain racial identity development but also race relations. “We know the mixed-race population is at the core of changing race relations in the United States, but we lack



clarity as to whether multiracialism is demolishing or reinforcing racial hierarchies” (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p. 26). What I would add is the plea to not also continue the comparison of monoracial and biracial identity development by basing theoretical research solely on those of Black and White descent and use a one-size-fits-all approach. While there may be aspects of a collective biracial experience, it is clear from the AAKs in this study that there are also important differences.

### Methodological Implications

The current investigation utilized ethnographic interviews within a phenomenological framework. Ethnographic interviews allowed for extended time spent with participants in their own environments, which allowed for detailed observations of interactions between researcher and participant to be used as important data. Phenomenological interviews typically last from 30 minutes to 1 hour (Polkinghorne, 1989), which may not be enough time to build rapport with study participants, let alone gather enough of their lived experiences. It was in my time spent with participants in the field where I was at times able to meet members of their families and share a meal, which allowed for more understanding of who they were as people. It is the shared emphasis on the importance of people as not just participants but as human beings with stories to tell that aligns both phenomenology and ethnography.

I have intentionally been transparent from the beginning of the research process of my shared membership in the AAK communal group. While keeping field notes and self-reflections throughout the research process are both recommended in ethnographic and phenomenological research, for me as an AAK, my self-reflections also served as auto-

ethnographical explorations. In the interest of continued transparency of my process, I would like to share reflections on my own journey and how aspects of my lived experience are both similar to and different than the AAKs in this study.

The experience of meeting these seven other people of Black and Korean descent was indescribable. I also have had virtually no interactions with other AAKs since leaving the military base in Germany at the age of 13. I can vividly remember the talks I had with my parents about my being Black, although my mom was Korean—talks my parents had with me about how the world views those who are Black as less than and how I needed to be at least 10 times better at everything I did in order to make it. What my parents could not have prepared me for because, as was said by one of this study's participants, neither one of them was biracial so they don't know, was that Black people would not always see me just as Black and that there would be times when I would be ashamed to be Korean. Shame was not something that was discussed in the other AAKs narratives but is a painful part of my story. Being Korean in addition to Black made it difficult for me to fully blend in with the other Black kids in high school, and the one thing I wanted desperately was to be just like the other Black kids. My conscious and perhaps unconscious choice of primarily African American partners was a way to negotiate my racial identity as a Black woman and was also the result of having a predominantly Black social circle. While my mom was the main person telling me that I was in fact Black in the eyes of society, my choice to negotiate this sole identity was difficult for her and at times caused conflict and hurt within our relationship.

As I grew older, something began to shift in my view of myself racially. There was a nagging feeling that there was some soul searching I had to do, some pain that I had

to allow to come to the surface. I could not have taken on the responsibility of being the one to share the stories of these seven AAKs if I was not willing to share my own. At this point in my life, my working theory (as Janet eloquently states) of my racial identity is that of a Black and Korean woman. It is true that I experience the world as a Black woman, but my connection to Korean culture is stronger than it has ever been. I credit this shift to *my seeing myself* as Korean. The influence of Korean culture has been an important part of my life, which is something that I share with my participants. What I also share with the seven other AAKs is a sense of community and pride to have been given the opportunity and permission to give voice to their stories.

### Study Strengths and Limitations

#### *Strengths*

The undertaking and completion of this phenomenological study on the lived experiences of AAKs is groundbreaking given the fact that it is the first study to specifically focus on this particular cultural group. While other studies have included AAKs within their sample, no study to date has captured the voices of members of this cultural group alone. This study also answers the call from researchers who have advocated for the need to be more specific about who is being studied in biracial research. Many authors do not make it clear who they are discussing when they say “biracial” (Gillem et al., 2007). This study specifically studies one subgroup of multiple heritage individuals, those of African American and Korean descent, which allowed for focused exploration on their lived experiences.

Another relationship that the current study has to previous and current research is adding to the limited research on biracial individuals of multiple communities of color. As has been previously discussed, the majority of research on biracial persons has been with those of African American and White descent. When researching mixed-race Asians, individuals of White and Asian descent are profiled. The limited focus on these biracial populations is one that often leaves out of the discourse individuals who have a foot in two communities of color. This study of AAK lived experiences adds a powerful voice to the discourse, as these individuals have roots in two communities that are often seen as being opposite or, at the very least, meeting only in limited contexts.

The use of a holistic framework in which to gather the lived experiences of AAKs is also a major strength. The impact of race and identity in the lives of the study participants was allowed to emerge organically, which is different from other studies that have a focus on racial identity development. The fact that it was talked about by each of the seven AAKs highlights the importance of this process in their lives.

### *Limitations*

All research has its limitations and this study is no different. The nature of qualitative research is one in which generalizability of results is not the main goal. This study of seven AAKs living in various regions of the United States with a Korean immigrant mother and African American father in the military cannot be generalized to others with the same cultural background. Another limitation is the total number of participants interviewed. A total of seven AAKs were interviewed in the first round of data collection, and five out of those seven participated in follow-up interviews. More

study participants could have added more perspectives on the lived experiences of AAKs and perhaps more collective themes would have been gleaned. Not having all seven participants participate for follow-up interviews meant the loss of two participants for member checks and to possibly add to their narratives.

The majority of women versus one male among the participants made it difficult to make comparisons based on gender. Also, due to Jack not participating in the follow-up interview, the opportunity was lost to hear him give his thoughts on his first interview and the preliminary collective themes.

### Conclusion

The current investigation on the lived experiences of AAKs is the first to exclusively focus on this cultural group. It helps to fill the void in research on AAKs and, more broadly, scholarship on biracial persons from two communities of color. Study findings suggest that although AAKs have some similar experiences to other biracial populations that have been more commonly studied, there are aspects that are unique to their particular group. One of the most poignant findings of this study was the emergence of the experience of being the othered “other.”

Being in the position of the othered “other” encompasses being marginalized while having membership in an already marginalized group. This “othering” seems to be the result of stereotypical views on the limited ways that members of the African American and Korean communities interact with each other. The dilemma for AAKs is that in this study a common denominator was parents meeting within a military context, which is also the stereotype. Although this may cause some internal conflict, participants

in this study were able to navigate the waters of life and develop a racial identity(ies) that was shaped by familial messages and encounters with race/racism. For a couple of the AAKs, they acknowledged that this was an ongoing process.

Findings from the current study can help to better inform clinicians who may work with AAK clients, as well as challenge clinicians to become aware of any biases and/or assumptions they may have in regard to persons of African American and Korean heritages. Exploration of the lived experiences of AAKs is in its infancy, which leaves the possibilities for future research rich and vast. In the current investigation, I have argued for the inclusion of AAKs in the broader discussion concerning biracial populations in order to dispel the myth of a universal biracial experience. It is my hope that with this study other researchers will be motivated to reach out to all the members of the diverse biracial population in order to allow more voices to join the dialogue.

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Appendix A

Email Script



### Email Script

The following script was used to request assistance from various organizations to help the student investigator in recruiting potential study informants.

Subject:

Dissertation Research on Adults of African American and Korean Descent

Body:

Hello,

My name is Liz Bradshaw and I am an African American and Korean counseling psychology doctoral student at Western Michigan University. I am conducting a qualitative dissertation study on the lived experiences of individuals of Korean and African American descent. I am actively contacting organizations as possible resources for recruiting participants to conduct interviews with. I was wondering if (name of organization) would be open to helping me with this project in the near future. I would also welcome and greatly appreciate any other recruitment suggestions or resources that would be beneficial in reaching this segment of the multiple heritage population. I appreciate your time and look forward to hearing from your organization soon.

Thank you, Liz

Appendix B

Phone Script

### Phone Script

The following phone script was used to invite individuals to participate in the study.

Hello, my name is Liz Bradshaw. I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Western Michigan University. (Fill in name) has given me your name because she/he thought you may be interested in participating in a study I am conducting to complete my dissertation. The study focuses on the inner worlds of adults with African American and Korean heritage. I would like to invite you to participate in a series of two interviews. Would you be willing to learn more about the study to see if you may want to take part?

\*If the individual expresses interest in learning more about the study in order to make a decision whether she/he would like to potentially participate in it, a mutually convenient meeting time for completing the consent process will be scheduled. In this meeting, the individual will have a chance to review the consent document and ask questions. At this point, the potential participant will have an opportunity to agree or refuse to proceed with the interview.

Appendix C  
Informed Consent

**INFORMED CONSENT**  
**WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**  
**Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology**

**Principal Investigator:** Phillip D. Johnson, Ph.D.

**Student Investigator:** Elizabeth S. Bradshaw, M.Ed.

**Title of Study:** The Inner Worlds of Adults with African American and Korean Heritage

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "*The Inner Worlds of Adults with African American and Korean Heritage*." This project will serve as Elizabeth S. Bradshaw's dissertation for the requirements of the PhD in counseling psychology. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**

The purpose of this study is to explore the inner worlds of a small group of adults with African American and Korean (AAK) heritage and to understand the meaning they make of their life experiences. One of the goals of this study is to have the meaning we make of the experiences of AAKs be informed as much as possible by the way AAKs themselves understand their experience.

**Who can participate in this study?**

Adults at least eighteen years of age who have one parent of Korean heritage and another of African American heritage are eligible for participating in this study. The student investigator will meet with potential study participants to gauge their appropriateness for the current study prior to participation. Finally, all possible interviewees have to be willing and able to commit to two audio-taped interview sessions lasting approximately 2-2 ½ hours each.

**Where will this study take place?**

The initial interview will be conducted at locations which are favorable for everyday conversation and mutually agreed upon by both the student investigator and each participant. The follow up interview(s) will be conducted by phone.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**

Total expected participant time is seven to eight hours across six months. This includes five hours of interviews as well as two to three additional hours to account for the time it will take participants to read and reflect on their individual narratives.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**

During the initial interview, participants will be asked to share their personal experiences as an adult of African American and Korean heritage. During the follow-up interview, each participant will be asked questions about their responses as well as their thoughts and feelings about their individual narrative.

**What information is being measured during the study?**

To allow for a deeper and richer understanding of the cultural and social worlds of adults of Korean and African American heritage in depth interviews will be utilized. Specifically experiences regarding ten life domains will be inquired: self, family, residential, romance, spirituality, social / political, leisure, education, relationships and career.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**

As in all research there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. The researcher anticipates minimal risk to the participant, such as mild discomfort when discussing uncomfortable issues about their life experiences. Should you become significantly upset by the interview process; the interview can be stopped at any time. Referrals will be provided to all participants in the event that difficulty is experienced regarding their participation in this study. You will be responsible for the cost of therapy if you choose to pursue it.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**

Benefits of participation in this study may include the opportunity participants have to reflect on issues pertaining to their development and life experiences as a person of African American and Korean descent. As well as to contribute to a study that has the potential to inform research and practice concerning the concerns of persons of multiple heritages. Likewise, participants may benefit from the awareness that they are participating in giving voice to the stories of people of African American and Korean descent, stories that have often been silenced or neglected in the past. This study, more generally, will contribute to the small amount of existing literature on the experience of multiple heritages and will provide a much needed specific perspective on those who are of African American and Korean heritage to this research area.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**

The researchers acknowledge that one cost to participants is the 120-150 minute per session time commitment required to participate in an individual interview. Another cost is that there will be two interview sessions during the course of study participation.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**

All of the information collected from participants is confidential. In addition, interviewees' responses will never be attached to any identifying information. To best protect confidentiality, participants' names and any other identifying information will be disguised when data is transcribed. All contact information will be kept and secured and

destroyed once it is no longer needed. No identifying information will be used in any subsequent publications.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**

You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study.

The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact Elizabeth Bradshaw M.Ed. at 269-352-7407, [elizabeth.bradshaw@wmich.edu](mailto:elizabeth.bradshaw@wmich.edu) or Phillip Johnson Ph.D. at 269-387-5123, [phillip.johnson@wmich.edu](mailto:phillip.johnson@wmich.edu), the WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293, or the WMU Vice President for research at 269-387-8298. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

-----  
I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

---

Please Print Your Name

---

Participant's signature

---

Date

## Appendix D

### Guide for Initial Interview Questions



## Guide for Initial Interview Questions

In our interview today, there are ten life domains that I wish to learn about (self, family, residential, romance, spirituality, social / political, leisure, education, relationships and career). Please start wherever you would like, perhaps with one of these areas that you can most connect with right now, and share your story. We'll talk for awhile and then I'll pause and think about where we have been and what else we need to talk about. Which one of these domains would you like to start with?

Prompts/follow up questions:

### Self

- Tell me about yourself.
- When and where were you born and raised?
- How would you identify yourself?

### Family

- What is/was your family like? (relationships with siblings, cousins, other relatives etc.)
- Where were your parents from? How did they meet?
- What does/did your family like to do together? (religious, social, casual, formal, professional, etc.)

### Residential

- What type of area/neighborhood(s) did you grow up in?
- What type of area/neighborhood do you currently live?

### Romance

- What are your dating experiences?
- What are your dating preferences (if any)?

### Spirituality

- How would you describe your spiritual beliefs?
- How was spirituality talked about and/or practiced in your family?

### Social / Political

- What social and/or political causes are you passionate about and why?
- How would you describe your views on society and/or politics as a whole?

### Leisure

- What do you like to do for fun?
- What are your hobbies?

### Education

- Tell me about your life at school (K-12 & college if applicable).
- What do/did you think about school?

### Relationships

- How would you describe your friendship groups growing up?
- How do you think others (family, siblings, teachers, friends, strangers) see you and why?
- Please describe your interactions and relationships with family, peers and significant others.

### Career

- What do you do for a living?
- What are your career aspirations?

### Additional probes:

Can you give me an example?

Could you describe a typical\_\_\_\_\_?

Tell me more about that.

What was that like for you?

How did you feel?

How has that changed over time?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Do you know any other AAKs who may be willing to participate in an interview?

Appendix E

Letter Prior to Follow-up Interview

## Letter Prior to Follow-up Interview

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in name of participant),

I am looking forward to talking with you on \_(fill in date and time of interview) for our follow-up interview about your experiences as an adult of African American and Korean heritage. Enclosed is a copy of the transcript of our interview on (fill in date of initial interview). It is important to me that we have the opportunity to talk about how accurately your own experiences are reflected in your individual transcript and whether this story sparks further thoughts about your own experiences. I appreciate your taking the time to read this transcript, and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Liz Bradshaw

## Appendix F

### Guide for Second Interview Questions

### Guide for Second Interview Questions

1. What are your comments and reactions to the transcript of our initial interview?
2. What are your reactions to the collective themes I found amongst participants of the study?
3. These are things that I've heard you talk about today but will ask you again in a broad way, have we really captured what it is like to be an adult with African American and Korean heritage? Or is there more to the story?
4. Thinking about some of the themes we have discussed could you share what other adults with African American and Korean heritage might say about this? What would they say?

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board  
Letter of Approval

## WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: February 10, 2009

To: Phillip Johnson, Principal Investigator  
Elizabeth Bradshaw, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Naugle", written over the printed name "Chair".

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 09-01-37

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "The Inner Worlds of Adults of African American and Korean Heritage: An Interview Research Study" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: February 10, 2010