

**RE-EXAMINING THE ‘HEARTLAND’: KOREAN AMERICAN
RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC IDENTITY FORMATIONS IN THE
MIDWEST**

by

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Re-examining the 'Heartland': Korean American Religious and Ethnic Identity Formations in the Midwest

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What is it like to grow up in the United States Midwest, without an accessible co-ethnic population, as a second-generation Korean American Christian? Drawing from forty-seven in-depth interviews of second-generation Korean American Christians who grew up in the Midwest, an analysis of the data reveals several aspects of their lives. First, Korean American families are moving to the Midwest for educational and economic gain, because of pre-existing networks with friends and family, and through family sponsorships. Second, this data reveals the long-term consequences of racism this population faces, causing some to desire to leave the Midwest, to internalize their oppression, or to work towards changing society through their careers and churches. Religious identity is a key factor in helping many respondents process the racism they have faced. Second-generation Korean American Christians in the Midwest also find a sense of belonging, that they did not find in their neighborhoods and schools, through ethno-religious communities: Korean American Christian youth camp and/or organizations during college. Participation in these groups strengthened both their religious and ethnic identities.

INTRODUCTION: THE ASIAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE ON AMERICA'S 'HEARTLAND'

"[College] was the first time I met a group of Asian American Christians with whom I can talk about what it was like growing up in a white dominant culture. Even at church having grown up at church and being a part of youth group, that was more like what I did on Wednesday nights or on Sunday and, but they were not the people I was living around and hang out with. So, in college it was such a different experience to have people around me 24/7 who were like me and had grown up in church or were going to church who had a curiosity about faith who were curious about Jesus and also very thoughtful people and that was so fascinating to me."

- Sandra, 45-year-old Writer and Campus Minister from Illinois

Sandra grew up in various cities and suburbs in Illinois, and in her adulthood moved from Illinois to Wisconsin and back to Illinois. Her parents have said that the first thing they did when they arrived in Chicago as immigrants was find a Korean church. Sandra's parents owned a dry-cleaning business and only closed on Sundays for church and two other days in their whole career, their two daughters' weddings. When she was in second grade, Sandra remembers a fellow second grader (she even remembers her name) was showing her where the bathrooms were in school and asked Sandra, "well, what's wrong with your eyes and your nose?" and Sandra responded with silence. Sandra still recalls this as being one of her "most painful times." Her family soon discovered that they were the first minority children in her entire school district. She heard insults and racist slurs, and she recalls, "I only knew they were directed at me because they were said to me and no one else. And I remember being afraid to walk home from school because of the boys that would follow and scream taunts and threaten."

It was in college that Sandra became confident in her identity: "it was there as a student my faith became my own and I began to understand what it is to be Korean American and Asian American. It was the first time I really identified myself as Asian American. And I really loved it." These processes of identity formation during college contributed greatly to the work she does today. As a writer of a blog, she focuses on religious and racial identity in particular. As a

Campus Minister she is leading and educating young college students to also grow in understanding themselves.

Sandra's experiences are one of many Korean American Christians who grew up in the Midwest. This research project focuses on the contours of everyday life, getting a glimpse into what life as a Korean American Christian is like in the Midwest. This project explores how and why these Korean American families ended up in the Midwest. This project also aims to show how second generation Korean American Christians make sense of the racism they faced throughout their lives, beginning in childhood, and the role religion can play in processing racism. Lastly, this project looks at various communities that these individuals participate in that allow them to gain a sense of belonging that strongly contrasts their upbringing in predominantly white institutions and spaces. This project will ultimately be showing the need for greater scholarship and focus on how ethnic minorities' identity formations can be affected by a lack of access to co-ethnic populations.

Context, Region, Midwest

What is the United States Midwest and why should we care about it? The United States Census divides the US into four regions: Northeast, Midwest, South and West ("The West and South" 2018). The Midwest region includes the following states: Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The Census is a powerful force in U.S. society defining and categorizing the nation across many lines, but it is far from being the sole influence in decisions individuals and groups make about who they are and how they identify themselves. For Midwesterners, there are the influences of rural agrarian culture, white and native-born conservative culture, and Christian culture, among others. In referring to a Midwestern mentality, the phrase "*Will it Play in*

Peoria?” became popular in the mid twentieth century. It was said, beginning in the vaudeville era, that if an act succeeded in Peoria, it would succeed anywhere and everywhere in the United States. This phrase became synonymous with the notion that the Midwest was the ‘heart’ of the United States, and Peoria is “Anytown, U.S.A.” (Groh 2009). On the other hand, the Midwest can equally be seen as bland, stagnant, and white (Wei 1992). This project will nuance understandings of the Midwest by questioning who is included in and excluded from that category. It also aims to emphasize the importance of region and context when thinking about identity in intersectional ways, specifically amongst the second-generation Korean American Christian population.

In recent years, scholars have become interested in deepening the exploration of the Midwest as a site of study. For example, Jon Lauck (2013), published *The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History*. In it, he states that his goal is to draw attention to the Midwest, a region that has been lost to the imagination (Lauck 2013). In his “call for the Midwest,” Lauck argues that what makes the Midwest great, and sets it apart, is its role in creating “America:” “The Midwest deserves greater attention from historians, in short, because the region played a central role in American development by helping spark the American Revolution, stabilizing the young American republic, making it economically strong, giving it an agricultural heartland, and helping the North win the Civil War” (Lauck 2013: p. 7). This project agrees with Lauck on only one point, the value of drawing greater attention to the Midwest. However, Lauck is promoting American exceptionalism, which this project does not aim to do, encouraging patriotic and nationalistic notions of what America stands for, which he claims are all encompassed by the Midwest. What Lauck seems to want to challenge in the popular imagination Americans have about the Midwest, is that the Midwest *is* America in an essential and fundamental way. A

reviewer of this book from the *Washington Post* confirms this and concludes his review saying, “hardly a day goes by that I don’t recall my childhood in Ohio and how it showed me the fundamental importance of family, school, neighborhood and church, taught me the necessity of hard work, self-reliance and kindness to others. These are American values, yes, but Midwestern ones above all” (Dirda 2014). In Dirda’s review, he confirms that the Midwest is America in an essentialist way, as he interjects his own perception of his own upbringing in the Midwest.

Sisson, Zacher, and Cayton (2007), have attempted to alter the discourse and imagining of the Midwest, in their *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*. They preface their text by including a poem by David Citino who writes, “We are, we chant, Illini, Hoosier, Hawk, /Buckeye, Husker, Cyclone, Packer, Bear/ in red, white, black, yellow, brown,” alluding to the racial diversity that can be found within the Midwest (Sisson, Zacher, Cayton 2007). But the authors also acknowledge, “It is a complicated and unpredictable region, and contrary to its popular image, the Midwest has always been distinguished by the diversity of its residents... No one particular group of people can lay claim to the Midwest” (Sisson, Zacher, Cayton 2007: p. xv). This text is a strong effort to change the narrative and challenge the imaginings of the Midwest in an inclusive way. The *Journal of Asian American Studies* has also aimed to change this essentialist narrative of the Midwest through their *Special Issue on the Midwest* (2009). In his introduction to this *Special Issue*, Dhingra (2009) states that this myth of what the American Midwest is “stems from the presumed white racial homogeneity of the area, in particular the large nonurban sections that suggest a simple, wholesome way of life. With immigrants of color from Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America dominating the population changes of the coasts, the Midwest becomes even more of a ‘true American’ marker” (p. 241). The goal of this *Special*

Issue is to show how place is an influence in everyday life, struggles for social justice, and cultural productions (Dhingra 2009).

Re-defining a space and time is imperative work, and this task must entail pushing the definition of the Midwest beyond Lauck's agenda. Part of what is missing are the histories and lived experiences of marginalized communities including racial minority immigrant populations in the Midwest region, where confronting 'difference' means something different than it does in traditional immigrant destinations such as California and New York. These lives and histories are a vastly different way to reclaim United States history and identity. My project will prioritize the marginal voices of Korean Americans in a region typically not thought of for its Asian immigrant population and their descendants (the Asian immigrant populations that are better known in the Midwest are the adoptee population and refugee population) (Kim 2010, Lee 2014, Lee 2015, Nguyen 2008, Trieu and Lee 2018, Wilkinson and Jew 2015). This is re-defining the Midwest, not merely recalling and remembering the already told and exclusive history of the Midwest. It's drawing attention to lives that can contribute to better understanding the nuances of identity for minority immigrant populations and their children. As Sisson, Zacher, and Cayton (2007) and the *Journal of Asian American Studies* (2009) have already begun to do, drawing attention to the Midwest today requires paying attention to what diversity has always existed, no matter how marginal.

New Immigrant Destinations

This project is able to build upon and contribute to a different Midwestern history partly due to recent studies that have begun the work of exploring and revealing more about the region. Gozdziaik and Martin (2005) point out a critical change in recent years in the patterns of settlement of recent immigrants, showing that immigrants are moving or immigrating to non-

traditional settlement destination states at a much higher rate than they are moving to traditionally chosen states. Gozdzia and Martin's (2005) aim, in understanding who these immigrants are and whether they differ from the immigrants moving to traditional states, is to contribute to the formulation of better-informed integration policies and programs. Their case studies—focused specifically on cities in Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Minnesota, and Utah—find patterns of obstacles to integration that may be remedied by policy changes. However, Gozdzia and Martin (2005) argue that some obstacles will be better served by change in perception, which they believe will only be developed over time. The consequences of not knowing of the experiences in new settlement communities are material and psychological. For example, in Shenandoah Valley, Virginia, the perception that immigrants are merely transient led to a denial of resources given to Hispanic immigrants in arenas such as healthcare, education, housing, and retirement needs (Gozdzia and Martin 2005). In these case studies, immigrants are not seen as permanent members of the community, thus investing in their well-being is seen as a worthless cause (Gozdzia and Martin 2005). The point here is that transition and adaptation is more complex and not the same in these non-traditional destinations compared to regions that have more readily recognizable histories of immigration.

Regional context

Region, the Midwest, must also be viewed as a potential influence that can affect one's identity formation. Having a flexible view to see identity as fluid is important for recognizing transformation and improvisation as an integral part of identity formation. Viewing place as an influence and force challenges us to ask how the Midwest is also a force for change and influences identities. Similarly, ethnicity is also a social construction that is affected by structure, power, and place, and is also prone to fluctuation and fluidity (Nagel 1994).

For the purposes of this project, it is imperative that the Midwest be understood as a potential influence on identity formation because its inhabitants are concerned with sense of place and belonging, and where one fits into that place, whether they want to be there or not. Generally, across various disciplines and fields, research on the post-1965 Asian American population focuses heavily on the East and West coasts, and it is especially California-centric. Wei (1992) briefly mentions the void of the Midwest in terms of how identity differs in this region, and also how the trajectory of political action reflects these differences in the Asian American movement:

While East Coast Asian American activists felt misunderstood by those on the West Coast, the ones in the Midwest felt ignored by both. As the Rice Paper Collective of the Madison Asian Union put it, 'Our invisibility is so total that Asian Americans are not thought to exist in this *vast banana wasteland*.' Except for those living and laboring in such places as Chicago's Chinatown, most Midwestern Asian Americans had disappeared into suburbia. Without a physical community to relate to, Midwestern Asian Americans found it difficult to start and sustain an ethnic-consciousness movement (Wei 1992: p. 30).

It is important to note here that there are Midwestern cities, like Chicago, where strong ethnic enclaves exist which may create similar experiences to other Asian Americans where they may not be as marginal a minority (Trieu 2018). What further contributes to the neglect of the Midwest, according to Wei, is how Asian Americans who grew up in the Midwest eventually felt the need to leave the Midwest for the East or West coast, because that is where the population of Asian Americans is much higher. Memoirist Linda Furiya¹ is one such Asian American individual who moved from the Midwest (Indiana) to the West coast (San Francisco). On her website she is quoted as saying, 'I'll never forget that day. It was a crisp, sunny, breezy San Francisco afternoon. I was wandering North Beach and remember feeling overcome with the

¹ Author of the memoir *Bento Box: My Japanese Girlhood in Whitebread America* (2006), which is about her childhood and youth growing up in Versailles, Indiana in the 1970s as the only Japanese American family in her town.

happy feeling of coming home. I had never lived in a city so full of the Asian American element...and the food! It was life-changing” (Furiya, n.d.). Furiya’s experience is precisely what Wei is referencing about Asian Americans in the Midwest and their need to leave the Midwest in order to experience “*full*”-ness of identity.

Wei (1992) writes, “In the Midwest, political activism began when Asian American college students came together for mutual support and collective action. Many of them eventually left college to go to an Asian ethnic community, usually on one of the coasts, in search of their roots” (1992: p. 11-12). The mention of a “search for one’s roots” implies that one’s roots are not where they are from if they are in the Midwest, and it begins to question an authenticity of Asian American experiences in the Midwest. When revisiting Wei’s and Furiya’s comments about Asian American Midwesterners leaving the Midwest and feeling at *home* outside of the Midwest despite having grown up there, it is evidence that someone’s perception of their sense of place and belonging may not be positive for some Asian Americans in the Midwest. Furthermore, do the majority of Asian American Midwesterners share this sentiment? Or is this a sentiment that needs to be juxtaposed with other views of the Midwest? With that, one must consider consequences for those who remain, those who leave, as well as considering the perception of immigrants held by non-immigrants and non-racial minorities, and their experiences. This project asks how Korean American Midwesterners’ experiences affect their identity formations, what factors influence it, and what the role of religion is. The Midwest is a complicated space because there exist many different agendas for how to handle, define, and view the Midwest. But these complexities are the reason that the Midwest can greatly influence identity formation, that is changing and influencing what it means to be American, marginalized, immigrant, religious, Korean American, insider or outsider.

Addressing region is a way of addressing context, and paying attention to the importance of structure, power, external influences, and history. Fenton (2003) says this about context and ethnicity, “it is the context that matters more than ethnicity. This we have illustrated by showing how the significance or salience of ethnic identities is, in many if not most instances, influenced by external co-ordinates of the ethnic action rather than by internal characteristics of the ethnic identity itself...It suggests that our attention should be primarily turned to these ‘co-ordinates’ which form part of an explanation of why ‘ethnicity’ has become a focus of action” (p. 180). It is because the internal and external both influence one another dialectically that context (such as the Midwest) is critical (Nagel 1994). When we are consequence-focused, we can most easily see the realities of the importance of context in shaping identity. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) for example, explore the context of reception that the second generation can experience, meaning the degree of openness and acceptance from the local community. Depending on the context of reception, it can either lead to a sense of belonging or isolation and even hostility. One’s context of reception can be influenced by a plethora of factors such as economic resources, language proficiency, and/or skin tone.

Ethnic identity can never be considered in isolation, which is another way of saying that there is always a greater context (region, the receiving neighborhood, social capital, etc.) that shapes one’s ethnic identity. However, how one perceives one’s ethnic identity is not always without contradiction. Seeing ethnic identity as fluid and changeable also means there is room for contradiction in identity. Honing in on the existence of “contradictions,” Lowe (1996) writes:

it may be through contradiction that we begin to address the systemic inequalities built into cultural institutions, economies, and geographies and through conflict that we call attention to the process through which these inequalities are obscured by pluralist multiculturalism. We need to think through the ways in which culture may be rearticulated not in terms of identity, equivalence, or pluralism but out of contradiction,

as a site for alternative histories and memories that provide the grounds to imagine subjects, community, and practice in new ways (p. 96).

Lowe's focus on tensions and contradictions provides justification for the need to unravel and examine the Midwest. Tension and contradiction are seen when Asian Americans do not recognize or acknowledge when they are victims of various injustices, when disciplines are not critical of the perpetual silencing of histories, when studies of identity do not consider the influence of religion as a social force and a product of social forces.

Context for the second generation Korean American Christian Midwesterners means looking at the social realms these individuals have created themselves or have been pushed into. This means friend groups, religious groups, and families. A step beyond that is looking at neighborhood, school, and church. Beyond that, context is city, state, region and nation. More intricately, for this project, it requires looking at scholarship addressing identity, race and ethnicity, history, space and place, assimilation and adaptation, the second generation, religion and immigration. The challenge with context is that it changes and shifts.

Context is also culture. Fenton addresses the various ways culture can get lost in the discussions of other aspects of identity. Conversi (2003) writes, "In the literature on nationalism, the terms ethnic and culture are often confused... By ethnicity we refer to a belief in putative descent. Ethnicity is thus similar to race. Culture is instead an open project... [but] since culture is necessarily based on tradition and continuity, it is often confused with ethnicity" (quoted in Fenton 2003: p. 21). While the general point here, which is that the terms ethnic and culture should not be confused, is important, it is dangerous to consider ethnicity as being similar to race because of the way that race is structural and socially constructed. Secondly, more than 'confusion' between ethnicity and culture, the greater problem is when they are conflated to

mean the same thing. Third, culture is not always based in tradition and continuity when cultures are sometimes created to break tradition and continuity (subcultures and cultures of dissent).

Sollors (1989) also discusses how culture functions in discussions of ethnicity and assimilation, by challenging the notion of the melting pot: “The studies that result from such premises typically lead to an isolationist, group-by-group approach that emphasizes ‘authenticity’ and cultural heritage within the individual, somewhat idealized group—at the expense of more widely shared historical conditions and cultural features, of dynamic interaction and syncretism” (p. xiv). This is precisely what ought to be challenged in Wei’s text because there exists an assumption that there is a ‘right’ culture or an ‘authentic’ culture, that the second generation loses or that the Midwest does not (or cannot) offer. Likewise, the central conclusion made by Min and Kim (2005), based on their survey data is that the first-generation Korean Christians transmitted religion to their children, but not cultural traditions through religion. The lack of expansion of the term ‘culture’ in their study offers opportunities for further development of the term. Min and Kim (2005) speak primarily of culture and socio-cultural activities in terms of language, food, and musical styles. However, how culture is defined is extremely important before determining how it is practiced and what is retained, it also begs the question of what Korean culture versus Korean American culture is, and how and who gets to determine which is “authentic.”

For second-generation Korean Americans, culture may have been redefined and hybridized in ways that the first generation may not recognize. Culture may be defined differently depending on population share and the access to co-ethnic populations. In areas of low population share, will the first generation be found to use different methods of transmitting culture to the second generation? Will they be more or less successful? As Sollors (1989) argues,

it is important to focus on culture and history as products of “interaction and syncretism.”

Interaction and syncretism are key to this project because they are reminders that culture is fluid and influenced by junctures. Thus, the second-generation will have a different culture than the first-generation and yet there can also be similarities of culture across generations. Because the Midwestern Asian American culture can potentially not have the same elements as Asian American culture in other areas of the United States does not imply that one is richer or more “authentic” in culture than the other, or as having more “Asian Americanness.” Going down this road of measuring authenticity has consequences of essentializing the group, homogenizing it to the point where difference is erased or oppressed, and stripping agency from individuals. Culture is ways of living and existing.

Context of Immigration

Breaking this context down and looking at history (which is another element of context) alone is multilayered. The development of ethnic identity of Korean Americans in the Midwest should begin with immigration history, and recently scholars have begun to focus on immigration to less traditional destination states (Gozdziak and Martin 2005, Joshi and Desai 2013, Marrow 2009, Vega 2015, Waters and Jimenez 2005). However, there is more work to be done. One article that reviews the field of immigration and assimilation notes this positively, “the lack of immigration history in new gateways means that the place of immigrants in the class, racial, and ethnic hierarchies is less crystallized, and immigrants may thus have more freedom to define their position” (Waters and Jiménez 2005: p. 117). To what extent this freedom is utilized and realized has yet to be confirmed. However, this newer literature is important because it recognizes new immigrant gateways and focuses on the present immigration trends (the reason is that only recently have the rates of immigrant population growth in non-traditional states been

much higher than in traditional settlement states even though the overall numbers are still significantly higher in traditional settlement states), which is an important start. Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) also argue for the importance of place-specific contexts and history: “the nature of embeddedness, as well as modes of migrant incorporation, therefore, depends on previous culture and history...existing social patterns and dynamics influence successive arrangements. Migrants’ place-making ability, and how they go about it, is shaped by prior cultural intersections in any given place and how they are articulated over time” (p. 144).

Korean American immigrant history cannot be separated from a history of religion. Scholars have noted that a significant impetus for Korean emigration to the U.S. was the history of Christianity and American missionary presence in Korea connected with the history of exploitation and capitalism (Chan 1990, Lee 2015). Thus, a history of Korean American immigration is also a history of Korean Americans and religion. According to Yoo (2010), “religion provides the most important entry point to Korean American history because it attended to the full range of human experience marked by complexity and contention” (2010: p. 3). Two years after the first Korean emigrants landed in Hawaii, a network of churches, mission stations, evangelists and teachers were established (Yoo 2010). It is clear that establishing religious networks was a priority for these early Korean immigrant pioneers. Moreover, in examining Korean American Christians in the Midwest, Hurh and Kim’s (1990) sociological study finds that irrespective of length of residence, about seventy percent of Korean immigrants in Chicago were affiliated with the ethnic church, and length of residence also did not affect the frequency of church attendance.

In the same way, looking at the history of the Korean American church in the Midwest is critical. It is important to note that of the Midwest Korean American religious population,

Chicago has been included in some scholarship (Hurh and Kim 1990). Is the Chicago Korean American religious experience similar to Korean Americans in other areas of the United States? Hurh and Kim's (1990) findings are often referred to as representative of Korean America, and not of a particular Midwestern population. Illinois has long been one of the traditional settlement states for immigrant populations, and even when Korean immigrants first arrived in the continental U.S., several moved to Chicago around 1905 (Sisson, Zacher, Cayton 2007). Chicago, according to 2010 Census data, has the seventh largest Asian population in the U.S. ("The Asian Population" 2012). While there is some literature on Korean American Christians in Chicago, the same cannot be said of other Midwestern states or cities that are less known for their immigrant populations.

A history of adaptation and assimilation in the Midwest for immigrants and for Asian Americans is also lacking. Certainly, scholars have long been invested in theorizing and studying acculturation, integration and assimilation of immigrants, but there is room to include areas with lower population share for these immigrants. Fortunately, scholars seem to be headed in this direction to better understand not only the immigration patterns of immigrants in the Midwest, but their quality of life in the Midwest. Gozdzia and Martin (2005) include a chapter on policy relevance of their findings to aid immigrants in new settlement areas to better integrate with their societies. They consider improvements in language training programs, access to education and vocational training, culturally sensitive healthcare, community development, cultural heritage preservation, religion, law enforcement, commerce, and home ownership (Gozdzia and Martin 2005). Low population share can be the experience of being a minority (marginalized) of a minority, and some research shows this effect on religious participation: "The concentration of coethnics, particularly if they are also coreligionists, in the same neighborhood has been found in

survey research to be positively associated with religious participation among immigrants in general (Van Tubergen 2007; Connor 2009) and Muslims in particular (Maliepaard et al. 2012)” (Voas and Fleischmann 2012: p. 530). These studies indicate that population share, co-ethnic presence and access, influence the depth of religious identity. This scholarship moves in an important direction of not only providing some information on who make up these growing immigrant populations, but also looking at their needs.

A sub section of this would be the history of the second-generation in the Midwest, which also has not been thoroughly documented or analyzed for this region. This history is important because without looking at generations beyond the first, little can be known about acculturation, or lack thereof, for ethnic immigrant communities over time. In one of the most seminal research on adaptation and the second generation, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) conducted the *Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study* (CILS) of individuals from Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and San Diego, California. This hugely important study is successful partly because they chose locations where immigrants make up a historically and contemporarily significant part of the population. This project aims to move in the direction of drawing attention to the second-generation as well, but in addressing the Midwest population.

Context of Inequality

Another thread of history that is important is of inequality, racism, and injustice. Tong (2006) edited and wrote the introduction to a memoir of Wayne Hung Wong who immigrated to Wichita, Kansas. In the “Appendix” on methodology, Tong writes, “Given what scholars of memory have uncovered, it is not surprising that Wong in his early version of the autobiography did not mention at all the instances of racial discrimination he and his family experienced in Wichita...he could insist that he had experienced hardly any racial discrimination in Wichita,

although later interviews revealed he and his family did experience hostility both within and without Wichita” (2006: p. 120). It is not uncommon for painful, unpleasant, traumatic histories to be repressed and for individuals (even groups, organizations, and larger entities) to instead choose to recall more favorable histories. It is in these tensions that I believe the history is most revealing. If a respondent reports that they never experienced prejudice or discrimination in their life, but five minutes later tells a story about how they were denied work, but a white individual was hired the next day, both comments can be true. It is important to recall both narratives and not minimize one or the other because of the dialectical complexities of the desire to employ assertion of identity and recognize the real consequences of injustice. Where history is important here is to see longer patterns of inequality and injustice, which can help situate how inequality functions and exists contemporarily.

This project is one where region will be contextualized, context is consequence focused, and history is reality shaping. Korean American ethnic and religious identity formations in the Midwest bring these various ways of thinking together with the hope that these experiences and lives will be heard, read, and better understood.

Religious Context

How do region and context influence the religious identities and practices of immigrants? Especially with recent attention drawn to new immigrant destinations, scholars of immigrant religions should investigate whether these new locations also influence religious identity and practice, and if that is different across various religions. What scholarship in immigration and religion already acknowledge is that religion is an important aspect of immigrant life in the U.S. Thus, these areas with smaller or newer immigrant populations should also be addressed and acknowledged in regard to religion and religious identities. Alper and Olson’s (2013) scholarship

on Jewish Americans in low population share areas shows the importance of this work, and also points out what newer direction this scholarship needs to take, such as focusing on ethnic and racial identity salience. The central conclusion from this particular study is that population share *does* impact identity formations and salience of identities. And if low population share affects religious identity, the implication is that residential patterns, settlement locations, and environments are important.

Like Gozdzia and Martin (2005) also find, new immigrant destinations are different from traditional destinations because they do not have histories of immigrants and thus, these immigrants are moving to areas where residents are unfamiliar with living beside immigrants. Therefore, in low population share areas for religious immigrants, religious identity salience is affected. This is important for not only better understanding religious and ethnic identity formation but also for the concern of the well-being of these populations. Studies in immigration and religion (Cadge and Ecklund 2007, Edgell 2012) do not address low population share or newer settlement states. Studies on immigration and assimilation (Waters and Jimenez 2005) address the importance of religion and religious identities and now recognize the need to address newer locations where immigrants are living. These different areas of thought should intersect to present a more thorough picture of these processes of identity formation and incorporation.

Asian American Identities and Experiences in the Midwest

In beginning this exploration, the work that has already been done showing who Midwestern Asian Americans are, should be recognized and acknowledged. The following section presents an overview of avenues and platforms that have been utilized to address aspects of Midwestern Asian American identity. These expressions of identity not only need to be

recognized as work that has already been done, but they also offer opportunity to see where there is room to grow in understanding Midwestern Asian American complexities and nuances.

In 2015, Wilkinson (currently in Michigan) and Jew (currently in Wisconsin) co-edited *Asian Americans in Michigan: Voices from the Midwest* published by Wayne State University Press. This important book argues that, because of the smaller population, Asian Americans in ‘the heartland’ have very different experiences than those who are on the coasts partly because the coasts are also characterized as having cross-cultural multiethnic and multiracial coalitions and communities that do not exist as strongly in the Midwest. *NBC News* (Wang 2015) and the local *Michigan Radio* (Stateside Staff 2015) also brought attention to this text, noting its importance for Asian American Studies throughout the nation, and local communities within Michigan and throughout the Midwest. In their interview with *Michigan Radio*, the co-editors of the newly published book explain the reason ‘Asian Americans in the Midwest’ is not a topic that has been thoroughly explored is because the assumption exists that there are no Asian Americans east of California. However, their book debunks this assumption and discusses how Asian immigrants began appearing in the Midwest in the late 1800s, how Asian immigrants of various national backgrounds would gather together in the Midwest as early as the 1930s, also showing that they were not always divided by ethnic groups or enclaves. Another important point the co-editors give for why Midwestern Asian Americans are overlooked is because of the black-white racial dichotomy in the United States. This dichotomy causes Asian Americans to be “lost in discussion.” This seminal text provides resources of voices that have always existed but have never been “listened to,” and challenges us to think past the black-white racial binary (Wilkinson and Jew 2015).

There have been other fairly recent academic publications that have chosen as their focus, Asian Americans within the Midwest. Huping Ling (2008) published *Emerging Voices: Experiences of Underrepresented Asian Americans*, with a chapter that focuses on the Lowland Lao population in the United States Midwest. This chapter looks at this population and their leader's role in assisting the community's adjustment and building a bridge between community and society. Ling begins this chapter by contextualizing how these refugees came to the Midwest, which is because the U.S. had a goal to not overburden any one geographic area with refugees. Ling states, "the resettlement emphasis was on spreading people out geographically, without regard to the existence of established ethnic communities being available in the area to support newcomers, and on immediate job placement, thereby effectively putting English-language acquisition as a secondary, almost inconsequential, concern" (2008: p. 53). However, the analysis of the impact space and place has on the well-being of the Lao population is missed. Emphasis on the importance of this contextual reality could more profoundly provide an argument for the potential long-term consequences that have come from "spreading people out geographically," how environment affects interpersonal relationships amongst co-ethnics, as well as between minority and majority populations. The addition of this aspect of their context and identities could have more greatly enriched discussions of Asian Americans in the Midwest.

Another outcome of academic pursuits to draw attention to this regional ethnic population comes from St. Olaf College, in Northfield, Minnesota. Ka Wong of Asian Studies organized three installments of a series of projects: *Asia in Northfield*, *Beyond Barbed Wire: Japanese Americans in Minnesota*, and *Asia in the Midwest*. The purpose of these projects is "putting forward faculty-student collaboration on collecting, documenting, and analyzing Asian American stories from uniquely Midwestern perspectives" ("Asia in the Midwest," n.d.) These incredibly

rich projects are film projects interviewing various Asian American individuals, asking them about their experiences in the Midwest, how they identify and their perceptions of themselves and the society around them. These generous individuals were willing to share their stories and have them online to be widely shared, with transcriptions of their narratives. Not only do these three projects (the third is in progress and has not yet been released), show that this population exists, but it also tangibly shows painful consequences that have come from living in the Midwest as Asian American, where living as a racial minority is especially salient. For example, Jane Murakami shares, “Growing up and being as American as I am, that when someone reacts to me as a person of color... it’s mind blowing... I walked into a bar, and... I felt like Moses, the seas just parted... Everybody’s just, you know, staring and watching me go past” (“Asia in the Midwest,” n.d.).

Another different outcome of an academic context in addressing the needs and desires of Asian Americans in the Midwest is MAASU, the *Midwest Asian American Student Union* that was established in 1989. This organization began out of a political need for unity among Asian American students in the Midwest, which led to various Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) organizations coming together to support one another. These students recognized that in 1990, there were twenty universities in the Midwest who had formed organizations for the APIA populations, and there was a great opportunity to collaborate to meet specific goals, as stated in their mission statement. Such an organization is a powerful indication that Asian Americans in the Midwest are invested in the overall agenda of being heard and are not sitting idly by (and not just in recent years) but are actively and politically having their presence known (“Purpose and Mission, n.d.).

The *White House Initiative on Asian American and Pacific Islanders* (AAPI) has also had one Midwest Regional Action Summit in Columbus, Ohio (2012). It is further revealing that the first and only time such a Summit has been held was in the summer of 2012, only six years ago. The nineteen-page report resulting from this Summit includes photographs from the day, demographic information of the population they address, as well as succinct summaries and outcomes of the various keynote addresses and plenary sessions. Their central agenda was to address this problem: “In comparison with AAPIs living on the East or West Coasts, Midwestern AAPIs are fewer in number, and they are spread across larger areas. Consequently, their presence is not as conspicuous, and government agencies may not be as proactive in reaching out to vulnerable Asian populations when implementing their programs and services” (p. 3). The 47.5% increase in the Midwest AAPI population from 2000 to 2010 is a strong evidence that this population must be better addressed by policy and the government. The states that they include in their definition of the Midwest are Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin, which differs from the U.S. Census’ definition. The greatest conclusion that was made throughout the plenary sessions is the need for disaggregated data so that the needs of the Asian American Midwestern population can more accurately be addressed and met (“Report on” 2012).

There has also recently been a growth in Asian American fiction literature with the context of the Midwest, broadening an understanding of who Asian Americans are, where they are, and also giving voice and identity to this group. Linda Sue Park’s novel *Project Mulberry* (2005) (targeted to an audience aged nine and up), is set in Plainfield, Illinois, about a young Korean American female student in elementary school and her best friend who work together on a school project about Korean silkworms. This novel is written in first person, from the

perspective of Julia, which allows us to learn about her constant negotiations of her ethnic and racial identity, racism and microaggressions within her family and within her neighboring communities, at a young age. In determining what to do their school project on, Julia thinks to herself, “I thought of Wiggle as a club that was all about country life-- farming, raising animals, cooking and sewing, stuff they used to do in the old days. Big red barns. Cornfields. Hay rides. That kind of thing. Silkworms just didn't seem like a good Wiggle project to me. They didn't fit into the big-red-barn picture. They were too... too... Too *Korean*. In Chicago there had been lots of other Korean families, and I'd had Korean friends. But not in Plainfield. We were the only Korean family in town” (Park 2005: p. 29). Within this passage, readers can see Julia's understanding of how she identifies, and how her context of not being around many other Korean Americans influenced her identity and perception of others.

First, when she says, “in the old days,” she is explaining that her own history is United States history, and perhaps even Midwestern United States history. Julia's context within the Midwest has also impacted her level of comfort and belonging. To be ‘too’ ethnic would not be a favorable experience to Julia, based on how she perceives her position within her society and community. What she does desire is a “nice, normal, All-American, red-white-and-blue kind of project” (Park 2005: p. 29-30). Julia experiences microaggressions from her peers, and an interesting and revealing interaction between her and her mother about African Americans and her mother's prejudice against them. Julia's coming of age involves understanding herself, her own prejudices, race relations in her own neighborhood and family, what racism is, her family history, and how she can actually influence people around her by sharing with others her ethnic culture and identity. To know that this novel is aimed at a younger demographic is powerful, thinking of how such a novel can help isolated ethnic minorities to realize and recognize that

they may not be as alone as they feel. This novel brings attention to the importance of region and context in negotiating identity.

Bich Nguyen's *Stealing Buddha's Dinner: A Memoir* (2008), is also a narrative of cultural identity and assimilation, and also demonstrates how the Midwest shapes racialization. In her youth, growing up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Nguyen was able to recognize the demand for her to assimilate. She interprets her context as communicating to her, "Come on in. Now transform. And if you cannot, then disappear" (Nguyen 2008: p. 11) with signs around her proclaiming Grand Rapids to be an "All American City" (p. 10). Because of these messages, Nguyen dreams of living elsewhere, imagining that people *must* be happy elsewhere (Nguyen 2008: p. 12). Religion also plays a role in her story. Religion was another avenue by which Nguyen was made to feel other, being directly condemned by white peers for not being protestant Christians like they were. Partly due to this traumatic experience in her youth, Nguyen connects whiteness with America and with Christianity in an oppressive and imposing way. Nguyen's memoir is a powerfully rich expression of reality, and of the Asian American Midwestern experience. These memoirs and novels are important lived experiences and voices adding to the mosaic of these racial and regional experiences and helping all of us to understand the complexities and nuances of who these individuals are.

The voices and lived experiences of Asian Americans in the Midwest are also being heard and seen through social media and online platforms. The students and faculty at Missouri School of Journalism are behind *Vox Magazine*. The author of the article, "Asian-Americans struggle to find sense of self in Midwest," is an international Asian student, and she begins with the personal anecdote of feeling distance from 'Asian-Americans' (author's hyphenation) because of perceived differences between her and Asian Americans (Zou 2014). By the end of

the article, and after interviewing several Asian American students, the author comes to the conclusion that she has much more in common with them than she ever imagined. The students that she interviews from the Midwest lead her to conclude, “that the story of Asian-Americans in the Midwest wasn’t so much about understanding stereotypes but embracing identity” (Zou 2014: n.p.). Though her four interviewees say they have experienced periods in their life when they wanted to minimize differences with their peers, later in their lives they seem to embrace who they are and their differences because it makes them unique.

In 2013, a Taiwanese American posed these questions on *Reddit.com*, the American social news aggregation, web content rater, and discussion website, “Any AAs [Asian Americans] who grew up in the Midwest (or similarly non-Asian areas of the US)? What was your experience?” (23 comments posted) (u/sueltos 2013). Similarly, on *Quora.com*, a question and answer site, an individual posed the questions, “Are Caucasian girls in the Midwest generally racist toward Asian guys? Or was that just my experience?” (7 comments posted) (Li 2016). From these questions, and the responses, it is evident that this population desires to find others like them, wondering if their experiences are common or are anomalies. The responses, and perhaps the questions as well, present anxieties about identity based on their experiences of loneliness, rejection, and racism. These sites can also show the diversity within the Asian American population in the Midwest, and the fight to understand their own, sometimes quite difficult, experiences.

Similarly, on *YouTube.com* there are eleven videos about Asians or Asian Americans in the Midwest, with a total of around 483,000 views and 1,775 comments made to the videos (“Search results”). From this popular platform, it is reinforced that there is an interest in understanding who Asian Americans in the Midwest are, however, the rhetoric and agenda differ

from the other online and published platforms. While some videos aim to explain who Midwestern Asian Americans are, and what their lives are like, several of these videos are titled with some variation of Midwest Asians *versus* Asians in some other part of the United States. Most of these videos do not use the term ‘Asian American’ and instead use ‘Asian’ which complicates how these individuals and groups identify and why. Unfortunately, that question is not addressed in any of these videos. These particular videos attempt to claim identity, uniqueness, and pride in regionalism. The attitudes of the individuals interviewed as well as the audience who comment are sometimes combative in tone, in asserting that their region is superior to the other United States regions. However, that is further complicated by many Midwesterners’ desires to leave the Midwest to be on the west coast, in particular. This contradiction and tension are revealing of simultaneously a need to assert pride in being a Midwestern Asian American (and claim some sense of uniqueness in asserting a strong identity), and the need to *escape* this very same place that in some way makes them unique and proud.

These expressions of Midwestern Asian American identity present a collection of experiences, perceptions, and realities. Together they begin to paint a picture of who Midwestern Asian Americans are, but also, show how complex their negotiations of self are, as well as how challenging it is to be understood. Each of these expressions is largely still engaged in the project of showing the rest of the United States that they are here, who they are, and why they ought to be not just heard but also understood.

These expressions also show that academics have a great opportunity to address some of these gaps in understanding. Specifically, addressing the nuances of who Midwestern Asian Americans are, and certainly make known that this is a population who complexly and profoundly exists, and whose processes of identity formations we can all learn from. My goal is

to build upon these existing projects and continue to explicitly show how regional context is a critical part of better understanding the process of identity formation for Asian Americans in the Midwest. I also aim to highlight how from the second-generation Korean American perspective in this region it is evident that religion is an aspect of identity that affects and is affected by other parts of their identity, especially ethnic identity, and therefore religion must not be overlooked.

Methodology

For this research project, my analysis draws on forty-seven² in-depth semi-structured interviews with second generation Korean American Christians who grew up in the Midwest. These interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2016. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, by telephone, or using *Skype*. The majority were conducted through *Skype* video. Specifically, second-generation Korean Americans who identify as Christians and who grew up in the Midwest were recruited to interview. Initially, recruitment happened via word of mouth, through email, and through personal and professional contacts. Contacts were made through student organizations, both ethnic and religious at colleges and universities, and ethnic churches were found through a general *Google* and *Google Maps* search. A research advertisement was emailed to these various starting points. Taking Cincinnati, Ohio as an example, there are several Universities near or in Cincinnati, Ohio, that served as starting points for the interviewee selection. At one such University, as one example, there are two organizations that serve the Korean American student population, as listed on the University website, *Asian American Association* and the *Korean Student Association* (both of which identify Korean Americans or Korean students as populations that they include). There are three Korean churches in the area

² See Table 1 for selected characteristics of all interview respondents.

that have English ministries alongside Korean language ministries that served as my second type of site to find respondents.

The same research advertisement was also posted on the social media platform *Facebook*. Starting from the initial respondents that responded to the call, snowball sampling was implemented, referrals from respondents to other potential interviewees, to connect with more respondents. While snowball sampling could lead to concentrations of respondents with similarities, it also allows for accessibility to smaller populations that are more challenging to reach. Through the initial method of convenience sampling, a negligible number of respondents were found, thus turning to the method of snowball sampling. Because of the potential for bias, as there is in every research study, it is important to note that this project does not aim to explain the entire Midwest Asian American experience. This project aims to contribute to recent research on these experiences, through a particular population in the Midwest. It must also be acknowledged that there is room for potential researcher bias in the coding process.

Once connected, each respondent was sent, via email, a document explaining the research project, how the interview was to be conducted, and matters of confidentiality. Respondents were not given any type of compensation. The interviews took between one and a half to three hours, and every interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each interview was analyzed using *Dedoose*, a qualitative web-based software program. Anonymity was achieved through the omission of all personal identifiers, and the assignment of pseudonyms. The interview instrument covered the following topics: family immigration history, neighborhood and school environments, exposure to Korean and American culture, national identity, regional identity, college, transnational ties, language, relationships, civic participation, ethnic identity, friendships, discrimination, religious identity.

For analysis of the data, the grounded theory approach was used. This means allowing the data to speak for itself, noting concepts and themes that emerge from the data (Rubin and Rubin 2012). The data were first coded by broad themes based on the various categories in the questionnaire. After this initial coding, an inductive approach was taken by coding line-by-line to identify prominent themes. Once emergent themes were identified, key patterns were highlighted through more specific coding.

Through this process of being an interviewer, and acknowledging bias, I intentionally thought through my positionality in relation to this project. Jennifer Pierce (1995) acknowledges what previous scholars have also come to recognize, “Recent methodological criticism suggests that the self in the research process should be fully articulated in research and writing, not minimized or neglected... Distancing oneself from their research subjects in the research process only creates a lack of clarity of their subjects (p. 189). Reflexive ethnography is where the “ethnographer becomes part of the inquiry (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Reflexive ethnographers use their own experiences in a culture ‘reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions’ (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740)” (Denzin & Lincoln 2002, p. 1). Furthermore, there is the matter of having an “insider” versus “outsider” status as an ethnographic researcher, bringing attention to the fluidity of a researcher’s positionality and relationship to their respondents and research. Vo (2000) warns that seeing one’s identity as a researcher in static and one-dimensional terms can further essentialize concepts of race and culture. Therefore, it is necessary that I articulate in what ways I am an “insider” and in what ways I am an “outsider” in relation to my respondents, and to also acknowledge any potential researcher biases.

I am a second-generation Korean American Christian who has lived on the East and West coasts and grew up in the Midwest. Certainly, these are not the only aspects of my identity, or anyone else's identity, but these are the most relevant aspects of my identity when considering the identities of my participants.

First, as the child of immigrants, and raised in the Midwest United States, I identify as being of the second-generation. There are ways in which I have similar experiences with other second-generation Korean Americans and other ways in which I have different experiences. My first-generation parents immigrated at an earlier age than many of their peers. While many first-generation Koreans who immigrated after 1965 immigrated *after* completing college in Korea, my parents immigrated to the United States during their high school years. It is for this reason that I have not experienced the possible necessity of being proficient in the Korean language relative to some other second-generation Korean Americans. Not being entirely fluent in the language (though conversational) may create camaraderie with some and distance from other respondents. This may work against me in how I am viewed as an "authentic" Korean or not, in the eyes of the respondents.

I am also an individual who was born on the East coast, grew up in the Midwest, who finished high school and college on the West coast and returned to the Midwest for graduate school. Moreover, my politicization as an Asian American was formed during college which was in southern California. Purdue University in Indiana is itself a unique space for Asian Americans for many reasons. One reason being the large number of international Asian students that has led to a conflation of Asian and Asian American identities. Another reason is the lack of Asian American representation at the institutional level. These experiences gave me an interesting lens

through which I could relate to and make personal comparisons and connections with my respondents' experiences.

Secondly, though I grew up in a Korean church in the Midwest region (in a family that was heavily involved in the church community), since the middle of college I have not attended a Korean ethnic church, and since graduating from college I have not participated in a Korean ethnic religious organization. Therefore, there has been a growing distance that I personally feel from Korean ethnic churches, which is different from the majority of participants I interviewed. However, many of my closest friends that I've met during various stages of my life are Korean American and Christian, so I am not entirely removed from this population. The fact that I grew up in the Midwest (Cincinnati, Ohio) and also currently reside in the Midwest (West Lafayette, Indiana) provided me with further ways to relate to my respondents as a minority of a minority. This privileged me with the ability to be empathetic to certain experiences such as being one of few Asians (let alone Korean Americans) in my neighborhood or school, and the types of stereotyping and prejudice and microaggressions that I faced and continue to face on a daily basis in these spaces.

As a second-generation Korean American who has experience having grown up in a Korean ethnic church, I was an insider to some and an outsider to others. Because I sought participants who identify as Christian, I could be viewed as an insider to my participants in terms of religious identity. However, there are many nuances in how religion is practiced, the salience of religious identity, theological beliefs, the processes of how and why we identify as Christians, and the intersections between ethnic and religious identity, which may have been similar or different to my participants. Pierce (1995) argues that "ethnographers move back and forth in continuous tuck between the statuses of insider, outsider, and what Patricia Hill Collins (1986)

terms an ‘outsider within’” (p. 191). This accurately characterized my experience as a researcher as well, where my relationship with my participants was always shifting and fluid. This awareness pushed me to be a researcher who is sensitive and perceptive of the experiences of my participants.

Overview of Chapters

In the pages to follow, I discuss the ways that second generation Korean American Christians who grew up in the Midwest make sense of their context and environment. I also examine how they respond to their context and environment, and in what ways they create what they did not have access to. Thus, the narratives of my respondents and the life they are sharing with us shows that the Midwest is not bland and white, and that how they identify is affected by their environment which does not include access to many other Korean Americans.

In chapter one, *Articulating and Re-Defining the Midwest through Korean Immigrant Histories in the Midwest*, I provide a response to the lack of literature of why and how immigrants settle in the Midwest region of the United States, a non-traditional settlement destination for immigrants. This chapter first provides an overview of the history of the earliest Korean migrants and immigrants to the United States, as well as an overview of theories of immigration and residential patterns. Following, is a presentation of the specific immigration history narratives of the Korean American Christian respondents and their families. Their reasons for immigration and their process of ending up in the Midwest are highlighted.

Chapter two, *Becoming a Bridge through God: Making Sense of Racial Marginalization*, begins exploring the lived experiences of these second-generation Korean American Christians in the Midwest. In this space and place, there is a pattern of experiences of prejudice, discrimination, and racism in these respondents’ lives. This chapter articulates these particular

experiences, and shows how respondents make sense of their othering, and how they respond to it. This chapter focuses on the role that church and religious identity have been one way to respond to experiences of othering, including how respondents saw an opportunity to become a “bridge” between cultures, identities, generations, and nations as a means of healing. This chapter also shares the negative responses of othering, including how this oppression can become internalized in harmful ways.

Chapter three, *Creating and Clinging to Ethnic Communities: Accessibility to Belonging in Christian Korean America*, emphasizes how meaningful community with co-ethnics can allow for critical restoration and reconciliation in how individuals understand and accept their ethnic and racial identities. In this chapter, how these respondents have found community, without access to a significant co-ethnic population is revealed. There are two significant ways the respondents have found a sense of belonging: a Korean Christian summer youth camp once a year, and through ethno-religious campus organizations during college. It is evident that these ways of interacting with other second generation Korean American Christians play an important role in their identity development as Korean Americans, as Christians, and as Christian Korean Americans within the Midwest.

Lastly, the concluding chapter will first provide an overview of the preceding chapters. There will also be discussion looking beyond the findings of this project to imagine where research can go next. Specifically, to further nuance the complexities of Asian American life in the Midwest, understandings of religious identity and its impact in lived experiences, and the potential opportunity for religious communities and churches to better understand their minority church members.

This research project is not intended to present an exhaustive overview of the Korean American Christian experience or the Korean American Midwestern experience. However, this project aims to contribute to our understanding of these experiences, both seeing the patterns that arise as well as the anomalies, to have a fuller understanding of who this population is made of. By focusing specifically on religious and ethnic identity formations in the Midwest, their identities will be better understood and hopefully spur on further explorations of low population share contexts and their influence on identity formations.

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CHAPTER 1: ARTICULATING AND RE-DEFINING THE MIDWEST THROUGH KOREAN IMMIGRANT HISTORIES IN THE MIDWEST

“[M]y dad went to do his Ph.D. at Cleveland State University, and so that’s primarily why they came to the U.S., educational reasons. Appa’s [Dad’s] friend was at Cincinnati and, he told Appa to apply. Simple reason.”

- Skye, 28-year-old Medical Resident from Ohio

“But in her [grandmother’s] forties, knowing what my grandfather was doing [having an affair] and being too prideful to confront him, and they having two kids—I think my dad was twelve years old and he has an older sister, so she’s thirteen—it was kind of a big ‘fuck you’ so my grandmother was like, ‘Okay, I’m leaving.’ And she fled to the U.S. and she promised to send for my dad and his sister a year later. I think she ended up in Ohio because she had a friend here... She just worked, like worked like crazy. She was a waitress, she was a seamstress, she made kimchi, she was a maid in a hospital, she was a maid in a house, like all she did was work to make money to send for my father and my aunt.”

- Cassie, 22-year-old Fulbright Scholar from Ohio

“Just to get a better opportunity. My mom’s older sister was a nurse. So, she came over here and was able to get a job pretty easily at a hospital and soon after, my parents came also.”

- Julia, 37-year-old Mother from Illinois

“So, for my grandma, for her it was, she was kind of hurting because she saw my dad hurting [recovering from a fire injury] so she wanted to help him, but she didn’t have money, so she didn’t know what to do. And so eventually my dad, when he grew up, he told my grandma that he had heard that in America they could do things like, they had their technology and things they could do were far advanced and so he wanted to fix his hands and he wanted to get surgery and because he was in pain as well, so he decided he wanted to come over to the States and get that done.”

- David, a 29-year-old College Pastor, Seminary student, Hospital employee

When thinking about Asian immigration to the United States, there are key moments and pieces of legislation that have shaped not only patterns of immigration but also the identities and cultures of the receiving and sending nations. In 1882, by way of fear and racism, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, turning the United States into what Erika Lee (2003) names, the “gate-keeping nation,” highlighting the United States’ history of exclusion based upon race. The Chinese Exclusion Act is a critical example of how racism and discrimination can become justified and legalized. War, and United States military presence in Asia, was another factor that

pushed and pulled Asians to immigrate to the U.S. such as Vietnamese immigrants and refugees, Japanese immigrants, and immigrants from the Philippines. The legislation that has most influenced the largest contemporary wave of Asian immigration to the United States is the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act (or the 1965 Immigration Act). Though originally expected to increase European immigration, this act in effect, massively contributed to Asian immigration and changed the demographic contours of the United States. It is this act that provided a pathway for most of the respondents from this project to immigrate to the United States. The families of all forty-seven respondents came to the U.S. after 1965, which allowed for family reunification. Other key historical moments that specifically shaped the pattern of Korean immigration in particular were Japanese Colonialism (1910-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), the wave of military brides following the Korean War, and the immense wave of Korean transracial and intercountry adoptees that began in the 1950s also as a result of the Korean War (Chan 1991, Lee 2015).

What has yet to be thoroughly explored is why and how these immigrants have come to the Midwest region of the United States (Gozdziak and Martin 2005). The Midwest is not a traditional destination for immigrants from Asia. For Asian and Latinx migrants, it is evident that the East or West coast is a more popular destination to choose. Why, then, are immigrants choosing to settle in areas where there is less access to ethnic enclaves and immigrant populations? Some families amongst my respondents did not first immigrate to the Midwest, but instead entered through more traditional immigrant destinations and then made decisions to transfer and move again, but this time, to the Midwest. Even after experiencing access to a more robust ethnic community, why are these immigrants choosing to move a second time to a less ethnically robust area?

In this chapter, I will first explore the history of the earliest Korean immigrants that came to the United States. I will then highlight several theories of immigration and residential patterns. I will then share the immigrant history narratives of my respondents, to fill in the existing gap in literature and to understand how and why Korean American immigrants and their families end up living in the Midwest.

The History of the Earliest Korean (Im)migrants

In order to understand how these forty-seven families fit into the larger historical context of Korean immigration to the United States, especially to the Midwest, the patterns of the earliest migrations of Koreans must first be understood. Early Korean migration was influenced by three key forces: 1) Religion and the role of Christian missionaries, 2) Japanese colonial occupation, 1910-1945, and 3) The Korean War, 1950-1953.

The American presence and influence in Korea, established over decades in the nineteenth century by American missionaries, consequentially led to Korean emigration into the Western hemisphere (Chan 1990, Chan 1991). By the turn of the twentieth century, several hundred thousand Koreans were already living abroad, mostly on the Asian mainland (Russia, Manchuria, China proper). For these first emigrants, there was not yet a need for government approval. These earliest emigrants traveled and settled wherever they could establish a new life. Also influenced by the external political and economic impositions of Japan, some Koreans also lived in Japan as students or laborers.

The American missionary presence was strong, and deeply embedded in the political, social, educational, and economic life of Korea. Horace N. Allen was the most prominent American missionary in Korea in the early twentieth century, and he played a key role in leading Korea to officially sanction departures of emigrants (Chan 1990). Allen first came to the Korean

peninsula as a missionary, but he did not remain in this position for long. Allen transitioned from being a missionary, to becoming Korea's foreign secretary, to minister in Seoul, to secretary of the United States Legation in Seoul, and ultimately to the position of American minister to Korea. Allen finally secured a position of political power and influence over the relationship between Korea and the United States (Chan 1990). In 1902, Allen stopped by Honolulu on his way back to Korea and met with the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association (HSPA). At that time, a large part of the laboring workforce on the sugar plantations in Hawaii had been from Japan (who had been actively recruited to replace the Chinese before them) and because of the Japanese laborers' rebellion in challenging the HSPA for fair wages and better living and working conditions, the HSPA turned to Korea for a new labor force to counter the laborers' rebellion.

The HSPA's goal in seeking laborers from different nations was to divide-and-conquer the laborers. Of course, seeking a new labor force in Hawaii was an old trend, not a new one. Filled with racist beliefs and attitudes, when the plantation owners struggled to convert the native Hawaiians into "docile and efficient modern agricultural workers" according to their own desires, William Hooper (sent to the Sandwich Islands to establish the first sugar plantation by the Ladd and Company of Honolulu) searched for a new labor force, thus turning to China (Takaki 1989: p. 3, 12). And then the plantation owners imported Japanese laborers (then returned back to the Chinese out of fear for the advances of Japanese labor organizing). Thus, a pattern of ethnic labor segmentation and a tactic of divide-and-conquer was already evident and in play (Takaki 1989). From their perspective, too many laborers from a single nation was becoming too risky. Allen agreed to aid the HSPA in their efforts to off-set Japanese labor strikes, but he did so clandestinely.

Allen agreed to help the HSPA and recruit new laborers from Korea, but only by communicating through intermediaries so that his official status would not be compromised (Chan 1990). There was an ulterior motive behind Allen's decision to help the HSPA. A governor of Ohio, George Nash, had fought on Allen's behalf for Allen to get his ministerial post in Korea. Nash's stepson, David W. Deshler had operated enterprises in Japan and Korea. Knowing that Nash was fond of his stepson, as a way to thank Nash, Allen wanted to help Deshler expand his business by recruiting laborers for the HSPA. Allen even persuaded King Kojong to give David Deshler an emigration franchise for his businesses.

Korea began allowing its citizens to emigrate because Allen had convinced King Kojong that it would be in Korea's favor on an international level to begin moving abroad (Chan 1990). Allen, a medical missionary, was able to gain the trust of the King by saving the life of the queen's cousin and her most influential supporter. King Kojong was in a very unstable position during his reign (he came to the throne at the age of twelve) because both his father and his own wife each headed their own factions within the court. Furthermore, King Kojong was also contending with the Independence Club which was made up of politicians who favored following the path Japan appeared to be taking towards modernity. On December 4, 1884, the Independence Club attempted a coup to kill the Queen, who was pro-China. It was on this day, three months after his arrival to Korea, that Allen saved the Queen's cousin and earned the trust of the King and his court (Chan 1990). In gratitude, King Kojong awarded Allen a royal title which allowed Allen to visit the palace without notice, a rare privilege. By February 1885, Allen was permitted to open a hospital that would serve Koreans as well as foreign ambassadors (Chan 1990). Two months later, eight other missionaries and their wives and family came to Korea. By the 1890s, missionaries supported by British, Australian, and Canadian churches also came to

Korea. 1884 was the beginning of a personal relationship that convinced King Kojong to listen to Allen and send Koreans abroad. It was also the beginning of Korea being exposed to Christianity, and foreign influences.

Initial Korean emigration to the Western Hemisphere was pushed primarily by the transnational economy of Hawaiian sugar plantations. In Hawaii, Korean migrants worked alongside Japanese and Filipino laborers who were recruited by sugar plantation owners and hired agents (Chan 1991). Between 1902 and 1905, more than 7,000 laborers were recruited from Korea to work in Hawaii, and 1,000 were sent to the henequen plantations of Mexico in 1905 (Chan 1990, Lee 2015). The laborers who were sent to Hawaii were the first officially sanctioned departures from Korea.

Fifty Korean laborers and their families entered Hawaii in 1903, the first of many to come (Takaki 1989, Lee 2015). Initially, Koreans were quite reluctant to make this extreme move to leave their home. It was not until Reverend George Heber Jones in Inchun convinced his congregation that Hawaii was a 'Christian land' that more Koreans were open to this drastic life change (Takaki 1989). In December 1902, the first wave of emigrants left for Hawaii, and half of them were from a single church, Jones' church congregation. It is estimated that 40% of the first emigrants were Christian converts (Chan 1990, Lee 2015, Takaki 1989). These first emigrants hailed from all over the Korean peninsula, but socioeconomically they were largely laborers, peasants, or unemployed men. Their first stop was in Kobe, Japan, to be examined medically. About 10% of the emigrants were women and 8% were children; these numbers indicate that many were intending to settle abroad and were not looking to return home (Takaki 1989). In fact, only one-seventh of them eventually returned to Korea which is a significantly smaller number

relative to other Asian migrants during this time period (Chan 1990). Between 1903 and 1907, more than a thousand Koreans in Hawaii did move to the continental U.S.

Japan's Growing Influence and Colonization

In 1905, emigration officially came to an abrupt halt due to the news of how badly planters in Hawaii were treating laborers reaching the Korean government. Furthermore, Japan was pressuring Korea to close the emigration office to stop Korean laborers from competing with Japanese laborers in Hawaii. Secondary migration of Koreans moving to the mainland was also halted by President Roosevelt in Executive Order 589 in 1907³ to calm anti-Japanese groups in California who were also sternly demanding an end to Japanese immigration (Chan 1990). Beginning in 1910 (until 1945), Japan officially colonized Korea. Being under Japanese colonial rule meant that whatever outside forces were affecting the Japanese also affected Koreans. Japanese colonialism certainly pushed Korean migrants in Hawaii to desire to move forward to the continental U.S. rather than choosing to return to Korea.

While official colonization began in 1910, the roots of Japanese infiltration began centuries earlier. Japan and China battled on Korean soil for power in Korea as early as 1592 (Chan 1990). Korea responded to this destruction by closing its borders to all foreign nations. Within its borders, there was much unrest and revolts broke out, the largest of which was the Tonghak Rebellion. In a cry for help, King Kojong turned to China, and this in turn re-opened Korea's borders to foreign nations. In 1876, Korea's first modern treaty with a foreign nation

³ President Roosevelt's 1907 Executive Order was an agreement with the Japanese government that there would not be any passports issued to laborers (skilled or unskilled) bound for the continental U.S. However, passports would be issued to laborers who were already in the U.S., and to the parents, wives, and children of laborers already in the U.S. Japanese immigrants who were already in the U.S. could re-enter even after they left the country and bring their families. These policies were known as the *Gentleman's Agreement* because Japan agreed to the regulations voluntarily because of strong anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States, and for fear of being completely excluded (Lee 2015).

was signed with Japan, the Treaty of Kanghwa (Chan 1990). The treaty required Korea to open two more ports to foreign trade. This also granted Japanese citizens extraterritoriality, which resulted in monopolistic Japanese control over Korea's import-export trade, and the right to lend money to pawn shops. In order to be rid of the Chinese influence in Korea, Japan forced Korea to declare itself as an independent state, evidently in name only, releasing Korea from Chinese suzerainty. The United States was the second foreign nation to sign a treaty with Korea in 1882 (the same year as the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act), which had the main goal of countering growing Japanese influence in Korea. By the late 1890s, Japan "tightened its control over hapless Korea by promulgating new laws, changing the administrative and judicial systems, abolishing the old Korean class structure, building railroads and telegraph lines, and introducing capitalist features into the Korean economy... on the night of October 8, 1895...they wounded the queen, poured kerosene on her, and set her afire" (Chan 1990: p. xxvi). The Japanese presence in Korea was violent and destructive to Korean identity and culture.

Japan then went to war with Russia in 1904 because of Russia's growing influence over Korea (Russia's influence over Korea grew because Russia offered King Kojong sanctuary in Russia when Japan attacked the palace) and Manchuria. Impressed by Japan's power and authority, U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft agreed with Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Taro to honor Japan's hegemony in Korea in return for Japan's noninterference in the Philippines (which the U.S. acquired from the Spanish-American War a few years earlier) (Chan 1990). The Japanese began to move to Korea in large numbers (farmers, businessmen, fishermen, investors), the Korean army was disbanded, and Japan took over every aspect of administration in Korea. The Korean language was replaced by Japanese, Korean teachers were replaced by Japanese teachers, and assemblies of more than three Korean persons became illegal

(Chan 1990). Japan left no stone unturned, and fierce distrust of the Japanese remains even today, amongst Koreans. Such oppression led Koreans who had left their home to reconsider ever returning; their home was no longer recognizable.

Until 1945, the end of Japanese colonial rule in Korea, there was an exception of individuals being able to legally emigrate to Hawaii. During this time, between 1905 and 1924, 1,066 picture brides left for Hawaii; nine-tenths of these women were joining their new husbands who were in Hawaii (Lee 2014). The men who had recently immigrated, despite planning to return to Korea eventually, heard news of the harshness of Japanese colonialism putting Korea under exploitative economic policies and oppression (Lee 2015). Therefore, these men sent for wives through the picture bride system once deciding that staying in the United States was preferable to returning to an un-free Korea. Like the Japanese picture bride system, the interactions between Korean men and these soon-to-be brides was primarily through photographs. Picture Brides exchanged photographs with prospective husbands who were already in the United States. They then had their names entered into their now spouse's family registers and applied for passports to meet their now husbands, who they had never met before (Yung 1998). The photographs imaged a future of hope and prosperity, when in reality they were often staged and doctored to appear as such (Lee 2015). These young women were faced with a shocking reality that the photographs did not showcase their futures at all.

Also permitted to leave during the period of Japanese colonial rule were five hundred students, most of whom were anti-Japanese activists. However, the Immigration Act of 1924, which reduced numbers of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, and barring nearly all Asian immigrants, prohibited Korean students who completed their studies from remaining in the U.S. The Immigration Act of 1924 restricted immigration to 150,000 persons a year based on

quotas (Ngai 1999). These quotas were allotted to countries in the same proportion to American people who could trace their origins to these countries, through immigration or the immigration of their ancestors (Ngai 1999). This critical Act reconstructed racial categories and “disaggregated and realigned” race and nationality in unequal and new ways (Ngai 1999: p. 69). While this new law differentiated Europeans by nationality and ranked them in order of desirability, it also constructed a white American race, distinguishing between those who could claim whiteness from those who were deemed not white. This law purported race as unchangeable. European Americans gained a separate ethnic identity and static racial identity, easily facilitating their process of Americanization. Meanwhile, non-European immigrants (everyone else) acquired ethnic and racial identities that were inseparable. This non-European group and their racialization named them as foreign and unassimilable. Ngai (1999) importantly states, “the Immigration Act of 1924 thus established legal foundations for social processes that would unfold over the next several decades, processes that historians have called, for European immigrants, ‘becoming American’ (or, more precisely, white Americans), while casting Mexicans as illegal aliens and foredooming Asians to permanent foreignness” (p. 70). This law clearly highlights how immigration law and policy influence, alter, shape, and concretize “official knowledges” of race and nationality, affecting all identity (Ngai 1999, p. 70).

Once the sugar plantation laborers completed their contract terms, many moved to Honolulu, and other urban centers on the west coast of the continental U.S. in order to open boardinghouses, bathhouses, small stores, virtually small independent businesses (Chan 1990). Those who were on the continental United States were primarily in California, and some in other west coast states. Many of these individuals labored in agriculture because no other work was available to them.

Establishing the Korean Immigrant Church

The establishment of the Korean Christian church for these new immigrants was another key element to their transition and new life. Within six months of arrival, the first Korean language church service was held by the Korean Evangelical Society. Due to Jones' Methodist church making up the largest portion of emigrants, it was the Methodist denomination that was largest (unlike the Presbyterian denomination that was largest in Korea; Allen was a Presbyterian missionary). Jones contacted John Wadman who was serving as superintendent of Methodist Missions in Hawaii at the time, who helped the immigrants rent a home for their worship services. Others established the Korean Episcopal Church in 1905. In 1917, Syngman Rhee established a secessionist independent Korean Christian Church. By 1918, there were thirty-three Korean Protestant churches in Hawaii, alone.

In the continental U.S., the first recorded church gathering was in a mission school in Los Angeles in 1904. In 1905, the Korean Methodist Church in San Francisco was started, and in 1906 the first Korean Presbyterian Church was founded in Los Angeles. The reason these churches were being established so quickly was partly due to the fact that church was more than a religious gathering, it was social, political, economic, and emotional. The church was life for many immigrants—which is still the case today (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000). And soon, it was the women who were exceeding men in numbers at these churches (Chan 1990).

The Korean church became home and life for these recent immigrants, but religion was also a tactic to be used by the plantations in Hawaii for their gain as well, first in bringing laborers to the Islands, but also to maintain control over the laborers. Planters recognized that working with the sending governments of their varied labor force could push the laborers to work more diligently. For example, Korean Foreign Minister Baron Yun was invited by the

planters to instruct Korean laborers to “1) Act kindly to the plantation managers and win their hearts; 2) Stay on one plantation calmly and do your best for your work by studying how to grow sugar; and 3) Save all you can and come back to your fatherland” (Takaki 1983). Religious beliefs were strategically employed for economic gain.

However, Koreans did not sit idly by. There is also an important history of resistance to tell. The March First Movement (1919) secretly planned nonviolent demonstrations to get the attention of a world that would not listen otherwise. And they did attempt to get the world’s attention in other ways as well. President Woodrow Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” included the reestablishment of independent nations in colonized lands (Chan 1990), but when Korea tried to plead their case at the Paris Peace Conference, they were rebuffed because of Japan’s Allies. Emperor Kojong (he took the title ‘Emperor’ instead of ‘King,’ under the influence of Russia) died in 1919, which gave Koreans the moment they needed to fuel the March First Movement (Lee 2015). Millions were expected to come into Seoul to pay their last respects to Emperor Kojong. Thirty-three people, nearly half of whom were Christians, signed a document of independence (modeled after the United States Declaration of Independence). Organizers of the movement made thousands of copies of the declaration, sewed thousands of Korean flags though Japan banned them, and distributed them throughout the nation. Christian leaders used their travel for religious responsibilities as cover to organize the movement.

On March First, as Koreans came into Seoul, the declaration of independence was read, and Koreans shouted “Mansei!”, meaning “Long Live Korea!” The Japanese police were unprepared. On March fourth, large groups of people began marching again, but the Japanese police were now prepared. They fired into the crowds, even calling upon the marines. By April, it is estimated that a million Koreans were involved in the movement (Chan 1990). In two

months, there were eight hundred demonstrations in six hundred locations, forty-seven township offices were attacked as well as three military police stations, twenty-eight police stations, and seventy-one public buildings. Japanese retaliation was harsh and violent. In one village, the Christians were told to gather in their church. The Japanese police bolted the doors and set the building on fire. The Japanese tortured movement participants in horrendous ways: women were raped, limbs torn from their sockets, flesh sliced with knives, bodies jabbed by bayonets, and people were suspended by their thumbs (Chan 1990).

Christianity played such a prominent role in the Movement because in Korea, the spread of Christianity and the emergence of modern nationalism happened simultaneously. Missionary schools that had been set up introduced the notion of democracy, and missionaries themselves played an important role. Though Protestant missionaries maintained neutrality, they still spoke out and spread news of the injustice they were witnessing. Some reports were even read into the U.S. Congressional Record (Chan 1990). This Movement emphasizes the spirit of retaliation amongst the Korean people especially during Japanese colonialism, as well as how Christianity became so strongly rooted in Korean people's lives.

In the Aftermath of the Korean War

Following the surrender of Japan in 1945, despite hopes of liberation and independence, the cold war superpowers swiftly negotiated the distribution of Japan's former colonies (Kim 2010). As a result, Korea was arbitrarily divided into two occupation zones (Cumings 2005). The Soviet Union took over the area north of the 38th parallel, while the United States took over the area south of the 38th parallel. By 1948, these two zones would become opposing states, and this would persist for decades to come (Kim 2010). The three-year Korean War (1950-1953), destroyed the peninsula. Ten million families were separated by the division, half a million

widows were left behind, and tens of thousands of orphans were also left behind (Kim 2010).

Thirty-six thousand American troops died in this war, and as many as three million Koreans died (Kim 2010).

The United States' military occupation of South Korea led to relationships between American soldiers and Korean women. The South Korean government estimated that there were one thousand mixed-race children as a result of the Korean War, who experienced harsh discrimination (Kim 2010). The mixed-race children were concentrated in orphanages close to the American military units along the 38th parallel that divides North and South Korea (Kim 2010). The Korean government was pushed to respond: "In the face of postwar chaos and the humanitarian crisis of thousands of orphaned and abandoned children, both full Korean and mixed, the Korean government moved hastily to establish an adoption law and to pursue overseas adoption as a solution to its immediate social welfare needs" (Kim 2010: p. 47). These soon to be transracial adoptees would contribute to major waves of Korean immigration to the United States.

Though the most widely used term to identify women with this history of being connected to these American soldiers is "war bride," this term is complicated by the fact that its emphasis lies on women's dependence on men and tying them to war. Therefore, they will be referred to as military brides here, as Yuh (2004) challenges and recommends. Immigration law has a history of discrimination and racism, and that includes the Immigration Act of 1924 which prohibited all Asians from immigrating to the United States. It was not until the immigration laws were amended in 1952, that this discrimination against Asian immigration was lifted. The only exception during this period were the Asian military brides who were permitted to immigrate through special acts, such as the War Brides Act of 1945, that would allow American

soldiers to bring their Asian wives to the United States (Yuh 2004). Between 1950 and 1989, it is reported that approximately 100,000 Korean military brides came to the United States (Yuh 2004). These women tell a powerful story about the relationship between Korea and the United States, the relationship between war and family/home, negotiations between Korean and American identities, racial, cultural, and gender ideologies, ostracism and belonging.

There are many intertwining and intersectional elements that shape these women's lives and identities, sometimes in painful and hurtful ways. As Yuh (2004) explains, "Their marriages are a direct result of ongoing U.S. military troop deployments in South Korea since 1945. U.S. military domination is what made these marriages possible and it has also had far-ranging effects on the tenor of Korean-American marriages" (p. 3). Though the decisions these women made are personal, the context of military domination, even militarized prostitution, must not be ignored. From each angle of potential belonging and acceptance, these women are subject to suspicion and opposition:

For Koreans, they were women of questionable character who had married American soldiers because such marriage was their only escape from poverty. For Americans, they were foreigners whom red-blooded American men had inexplicably married, and the 'mama-sans' who operated illicit black-market businesses out of the military-operated PX general stores or worked in massage parlors. For second-generation Korean Americans, they were the women sitting alone, without husbands, during church service and fellowship, the ones they'd ignore because everyone else did (Yuh 2004, p. 2-3).

It is out of this context that these women have given the opportunity for so many families to leave Korea, if they desired it, and to immigrate to the United States. These women are at the forefront of the relationship between the United States and Korea, as well as the forefront of creating an avenue for a new life for their own families to recover from the ruins of war.

Migration to the Continental U.S.

Through this history of the relationship between Korea and the United States, it is clear why the first waves of Korean immigrants to the United States, due to economic and governmental forces, came through Hawaii. Once in Hawaii, Korean immigrants migrated further to the West Coast of the United States because it was the nearest point of entry. Thus, the earliest histories of Korean Americans in the United States are primarily narratives of the West Coast, which has shaped where Korean immigrants have settled even today. With the Immigration Act of 1924, some Asian students were permitted to study at various U.S. academic institutions, though if they stepped foot outside of the U.S. borders they could not return. During this period, when Korea was also under Japanese colonialism, political refugees and intellectuals found their way to study on the East Coast. There are several individuals of note who are amongst this group of migrants to the East Coast. Soh Jaipil was the first “Korean American” to receive a medical degree from George Washington University in Washington D.C. in 1892. Syngman Rhee received his B.A. from George Washington University in 1907, a M.A. from Harvard University, and a Ph.D. from Princeton University, and would eventually become the first President of Korea. Boston, Massachusetts, also became a political hub for the Korean independence movement in the U.S., following the March First Movement in 1919 in Korea. When thinking about where Korean immigrants have settled, areas beyond the East and West Coasts have not been explored. In fact, there is little (but expanding) depth of understanding of Korean Americans who have migrated to the Midwest (with the exception of Chicago) or the South. In particular, we have yet to fully understand ‘why’ and ‘how’ immigration is happening though Korean Americans are currently residing in these regions of the United States (Korean

Americans: Abelman 2009, Wilkinson and Jew 2015; Asian Americans: Bow 2010, Hinnert 2017, Joshi and Desai 2013, Ling 2008).

As of 2015, according to the U.S. Census, the top ten metropolitan areas with a Korean ethnic population are (in this order of largest to smallest): Los Angeles (333,000), New York (211,000), Washington, D.C. (93,000), Seattle (67,000), Chicago (61,000), San Francisco (52,000), Atlanta (51,000), Philadelphia (41,000), Dallas-Fort Worth (33,000), and Riverside, CA (32,000) ("Koreans in the U.S." 2017). As of 2015, the total Korean ethnic population in the U.S. is 1,822,000, which has grown from 1,228,000 in 2000.

Also noteworthy is the tremendous increase in numbers of Asian Americans who have moved to the South. This region saw an increase by 69% of this population between 2000 and 2010 (Grover 2014). The second largest rate of growth, as of 2014, was the Midwest at 47%, followed by 45% in the Northeast and 36% in the West. Grover (2014), from *The Pew Research Center*, has discovered that most of these Asian American newcomers to the South are transplants from the coasts, thus, these areas were not their first destination. Marita Etcubanez, who directs programs at *Asian Americans Advancing Justice*, claims that the motives behind these moves are economic opportunity and lower costs of living (Grover 2014). However, *The Pew Research Center* has not investigated motives for Asian American migration to the Midwest, and other non-traditional destinations for Asian Americans.

Immigration, Race, and Residential Patterns

In their chapter on residential patterns of immigrant minorities, Alba and Denton (2004) argue that recent trends for where immigrants live show there may be diversity at the neighborhood level, but the urban residential structure is becoming more rigid. The factors that affect residential location include the difference in the immigrants' countries of origin, race and

ethnicity, and human capital. Alba and Denton (2004) see three patterns of immigrant residential incorporation: spatial assimilation, pluralistic patterns, and racialized ghettoization. Spatial assimilation theory argues that as socioeconomic positioning improves, alongside the process of acculturation, immigrants search for residential amenities (cleanliness, safety, better education, etc). Pluralistic patterns refer to the establishment and maintenance of geographically defined ethnic communities. Ethnic segregation also began happening, facilitated by immigrant movement near kin and co-migrants and the urban labor market. In patterns of spatial assimilation, if discrimination is not too strong in the neighborhood, many immigrants will move into majority group neighborhoods. While European immigrants experience spatial assimilation, African Americans are experiencing increasing ghettoization, and are more segregated than are immigrants. At the beginning of the twentieth century, immigrants settled in the Northeast and the Midwest in small towns and rural areas, but contemporarily, immigrants tend to settle on the coasts and in the Southwest in metropolitan areas. In the decades following, there was movement into the urban areas, which became possible through the movement of city residents to the suburbs.

Iceland and Scopilliti (2008), find support for the theory of spatial assimilation in their research (that when immigrants make gains in their socioeconomic status, their spatial location improves). They conclude that foreign born Hispanics, Asians, and Blacks are more segregated from native born whites than U.S. born individuals of these groups. They also find that immigrants who have been in the United States for longer are generally less segregated than recently arrived immigrants. Lastly, segregation for black immigrants is higher than for other immigrants (Iceland and Scopilliti 2008). Juxtaposed with spatial assimilation theory is the ethnic disadvantage model (place stratification) meaning that prejudice and discrimination

hamper assimilation because of structural barriers, despite familiarity with the language, culture, and customs of the new country. As will be evident in the patterns of residence of the respondents from this project, there is an evident desire to live in areas with residential amenities, especially with the provision of a better education for the children of the immigrants. However, for these Midwestern Korean Americans respondents it is not evident that they are living in geographically defined ethnic communities, unlike what may be seen in cities like Chicago.

Currently, there is a high concentration of immigrants in a very small number of states and metropolitan areas. Alba and Denton (2004) predict that at the rate of immigration that we see today, these groups will not be able to remain concentrated in these areas. Also, currently, amongst immigrant populations, spatial assimilation continues to occur alongside the growth of immigrant ethnic enclaves. In my project, I attempt to draw attention to changes in immigration as well. While the majority of Korean Americans in the United States reside on the East or West coasts, investigating why Korean Americans are choosing to live in places like the Midwest begins to shed light on this difference.

Overview of Respondents

For the forty-seven in-depth interviews for this project, each interviewee was asked what they know about their family's immigration history, why their family left, and how they came to the United States. They were also asked what their parents' occupational backgrounds were prior to migration and after migration. Thus, a greater understanding of how these particular individuals and their families came to the United States and to the Midwest, adds to the current lack of understanding of what draws these families to an area of the United States that does not

have a predominant Korean immigrant population (or even an Asian population), and is an unpopular destination for non-European immigrants.

Of the forty-seven respondents, the majority (twenty-eight) grew up in Ohio, eight grew up in Indiana, six grew up in Illinois, and five grew up in the states Wisconsin, Michigan, and Missouri. Sixteen of these respondents' families did not settle in the Midwest first, they came to the Midwest via another, or several other, locations. These sixteen families eventually decided upon the Midwest for reasons similar to the rest of the respondents' families. However, their routes of getting to the Midwest took different twists and turns.

The Midwest as *Not* the First Destination

For Reggie and Rachel, a brother and sister, who grew up in Indiana and Michigan, their mother and her family migrated via Brazil to Chicago before settling in Michigan. Their father first landed in New York before ending up in Chicago. Brazil experienced more open international immigration after the trans-Atlantic slave trade ended in the 1850s. From 1880-1903, Brazil experienced an influx of 1.9 million Europeans from Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Brazil also received immigrants, with smaller numbers, from Ukraine, Russia, Lithuania, Hungary, Armenia, China, and Korea (Amaral and Fusco 2005). In 1908, the first Japanese immigrants arrived in Brazil, which would grow to a population of 189,000 by 1941 (with a large influence from the World Wars). Most of the immigrants in the 1930s in Brazil came from Japan. Between 1990 and 2000, 5,364 Japanese migrated to Brazil (prior to this, there were 31,774 Japanese migrants, a significant number), and 1,546 Koreans migrated. Throughout the 1990s, Brazil experienced a significant increase in migration flows from Korea, most of whom came to Brazil to work in the textile industry (Amaral and Fusco 2005).

According to Reggie, the older of the two siblings (both siblings were interviewed separately), a 23-year-old male, their family's immigration history was greatly shaped by the political and economic context that the entire nation of Korea was facing:

On my mom's side, they were living in the North [what today is known as North Korea] and then when war [the Korean War] was breaking out, they moved to the South cuz they heard of all the things going on. So, they came to the South and then my grandma, my mom's mom, she was always the adventurous type, she wanted to find better opportunity, so she said we're going to Brazil. I guess that's where a lot of people were going at the time. We moved to Brazil. I think they did a little small business, but things weren't that great, so she decided to go into America. She moved to the States. Typical immigration story, she had a few dollars in her pocket. She just kinda made things happen. She found a Korean church I think, met people, settled down, got work. The rest of my family came, my grandpa, my mom, her elder brother and older sister.

For this family, there was a history of migration due to war (the Korean War), not only from the northern part of Korea to the southern part of Korea, but also due to the devastation of the war, from Korea to Brazil to the United States (Chicago). From this family's narrative, it is also evident what the role of religion was during the process of migration. The Korean church was an important factor in the process of transition and creating a new home. Their relatives on their father's side were able to first come to the United States through their father's older sister who was employed as a nurse in New York (who was educated in Germany during the War to become a nurse). Their parents were able to meet in Chicago because their father also moved to Chicago to continue his high school education after his family moved to open a dry-cleaning business.

Two other respondents had family members who came to the United States through another country, one through Canada, and another through Uruguay. Adele's grandfather (Adele is a physician who currently lives in Tennessee but who grew up in Ohio) was able to go to Vietnam to receive engineering training, and then was hired in Germany as an engineer. From there he went to Canada and eventually landed in Cleveland. Her grandfather was initially able to

immigrate via a work visa, and eventually was able to sponsor the rest of his family to join him.

Unfortunately, Adele's family could not recall specifically why he chose Canada and why he chose Cleveland. When asked why her grandfather chose the city of Cleveland, Adele suspects, "I just know that he was in Canada and I assume that because it was so close to the border."

Stephanie's mother's family first went to Uruguay for a year after leaving Korea. Stephanie, a 25-year-old finishing her bachelor's degree as a Fulbright scholar in Korea, explains, "I think Uruguay was just like a pit-stop. They went there because it was easier to go there and then apply for citizenship from there to the States." Stephanie's father's side came to the United States via Toronto because her grandparents had prior connections to people, a pre-existing network, in Toronto. Stephanie also did not know how their mother's side ended up settling in St. Louis after first going to California, nor why her father came to St. Louis after completing medical school in Toronto. These gaps in knowledge of family history are unfortunately not uncommon, and they do challenge our understanding of the full reasoning behind these patterns of immigration.

Why the Midwest?

Of these respondents who did not first settle in the Midwest when coming to the United States, six eventually ended up in the Midwest due to being accepted into academic institutions in the Midwest (Cincinnati, Ohio) or being hired for employment in the Midwest (Cleveland, Ohio, Cincinnati, Ohio, St. Louis, Missouri, Indianapolis, Indiana, Danville, Illinois). For these six families, it was not so much a choice as it was an opportunity, and perhaps the only opportunity available to them at the time. The specific fields these family members were in did vary: professor, construction, technology, pastoral, medical, engineering. However, each of these families moved dependent on the husband's/father's job. One anomaly of these sixteen families

who did not first come to the Midwestern region, was a single mother (Caleb's mother; Caleb is a twenty-one year old college student from Indiana) who finished high school and college in New York, but who decided to take herself and her children to Indiana to help her brother who was a pastor (in Indiana) and whose family was struggling financially. For this mother, it was the desire or need to help her family that drew her away from the east coast, and not employment or schooling.

Networks of Persuasion: A Strong Pull to the Midwest

The other reason that several respondents' families also chose the Midwest was because they had family or friends who convinced them that the Midwest offered many great opportunities for work, or that it was a good place for their families to settle down in. Cecilia, a 27-year-old seminary student from Ohio, shared:

So, my mom was also helping out with the 7-11 that her dad was managing. She also worked part time as a bank teller to learn English. She was also taking community college classes. But once she met my dad and they got married, both of them didn't pursue a degree. So, they met, and they got married and they had lived maybe six months in an apartment over in Virginia. Then moved to Ohio. From my understanding, it was my dad's brothers, my uncle, that had convinced my dad there were more opportunities for siding available in Ohio. So, they moved to Ohio and my dad had begun working in a construction company with my uncle.

Cecilia's younger sister, Daniella, a recent college graduate, further elaborated how their parents made the decision to move from Virginia to Ohio:

They had heard a lot from other people, their friends, that Ohio, especially Columbus, was a pretty good place to settle down, like the school districts, so Dublin schools are very good, and I think that was the biggest draw for them, that it's a good place to have a family, have kids go to these Dublin city schools. And it's also a very, it's kind of like a status, if you moved into the neighborhood that we were in, Merrifield, it's just a, very nice, so it's kind of like oh, our business is good enough to move here, live here in this nice neighborhood and for our family to grow up.

For this family it is evident that kinship ties and social circles were critical in deciding where to live, why, and how. There was also an element of access to social mobility should they make this move, that was enticing. Furthermore, the fact that they knew people in the area would contribute to their social capital and social mobility, in addition to the type of neighborhood (primarily focused on the school district, family friendly, status) they ended up in.

The Midwest: An Escape into Assimilation

For another family, they had yet another reason that drove their family to the Midwest. Ellen's father (Ellen grew up near Cleveland, Ohio and recently moved to Chicago for her first job) viewed the Midwest as an escape from Korea. For him, it was also a means of assimilation and adjustment to the United States in general. Ellen explains that her father preferred the Midwest over the west coast because:

When he first came to the States, it was Cleveland. Actually, no it was LA. But I remember he told me that he really hated LA. And so, he came to Cleveland... I don't know too much about why or stuff like that.

[So, you don't know why he came to Cleveland eventually.]
Mmhmm. I remember he told me like, I was like, "Dad! I got an internship in LA!" And he started telling me, and that was the first time I heard that he lived in LA before, but he said he really didn't like how crowded and dirty it was... It reminded him too much of Korea in that, you didn't need to learn English or anything. And it was just like poor Koreans stay poor kind of thing. And he didn't like that. So, he moved out to Cleveland, and he said there were more opportunities for him.

Ellen's father's explanation indicates how he views Korea, his connection to Korea, and his desire to leave Korea. These views were a great influence in his decision to come to the Midwest, it is a transnational and personal decision that eventually would affect how his family would experience the United States and shape their identities. Ellen's father's view also echoes

the voices of Kandel and Parrado's⁴ (2005) Hispanic migrant respondents' urban-out migration, except that his desire for distance from reminders of Korea compounded his reasons for migration.

The Most Common Reason: Looking for a "Better Life"

For the respondents' families in general, the most common reasoning for immigration has been prior family already living in the United States, for what they call a "better life" or "opportunities," as well as for their education. Thirty-seven out of forty-seven respondents and their families fall into these categories. It is also important to note that several respondents' family's rationale overlap across these three categories. These family connections only tell part of the story. How these families' first family members came to the United States is another piece of the puzzle that is missing in scholarship. Some of my respondents tell part of this story. Eleven respondents had female relatives who married American soldiers who had been stationed in Korea. This pattern is a part of the larger historical phenomenon of military brides that specifically connects these families and their immigration histories to war and international politics. It was as a result of the United States' involvement in the Korean War, that brought U.S. troops into Korea to be stationed at army bases, which still exist to the present day (but of course, as mentioned earlier, Korea's relationship with the United States truly began much earlier than

⁴ Kandel and Parrado (2005) have looked to recent Hispanic migrants to understand the forces that attract migrants to areas outside the Southwest. They link economic restructuring with the increase of a Hispanic population in non-metropolitan counties (structural changes in the meat processing industry in the Midwest and Southeast). Kandel and Parrado (2005) attribute this movement to the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, border enforcement leading migrants to cross the border farther east (than the Southwest states), and their urban-out migration thesis (movement is encouraged away from traditional migrant receiving cities with greater preference for rural areas, cheaper housing, better schools, and less violence).

that) (Yuh 2004). Though my respondents did not know specific details of their family member's relationships with these American soldiers (exactly where and how they met) except that they happened, there are many rich and powerful narratives that do unite these women's stories (Yuh 2004).

International Blind-Dating: Spousal Relationships Leading to Migration

Another important factor in these immigration patterns that emerged from the data was the impact of spousal relationships, even for those whose marriages were not influenced directly by the military. Four men, fathers of my respondents, had already come to the United States but returned to Korea for one specific reason: to find a wife. In Korean culture, the method that was most commonly used in such a situation would be "sogaeting (소개팅)," which is a blind date meeting that has been set up by friends or family. Ellen's parents are an example of a couple who met on such a blind date. After moving to the United States after high school (after her father lost his grandfather's earnings through gambling) and having been "working odd jobs," as a basement painter, factory worker on an assembly line, Ellen shared "my dad went back to Korea for about six months because he wanted to find a wife. So, then he met my mom, then my mom agreed to come to America with him. But yeah, so they came to—so he married her there in Korea, and then they came to America." Typically, these relationships begin and are solidified in marriage in a short time, even in just a few days.

Hannah, a 24-year-old curator in a biological resource center who grew up in Ohio, shared that her father used a similar route to find a wife, but spoke more directly about it. Hannah had a great aunt who married an American soldier who decided to bring her brother who was the most financially unstable in her family, and she sponsored him to move to the United

States. Eventually her entire paternal side of the family did immigrate to the United States. When asked if her parents immigrated to the United States together, she responded:

No. So like my dad was like illiterate, knew very little English, like high school education, no money. Do you obviously think an American would marry him? Haha. Super traditional who likes Korean food, most of it smells if you're not used to it. It smells badly so like there's no way he was going to find a wife here. And like honestly, I don't think he could be married to an American, himself on his side. So, everyone, all of the siblings went back to Korea for a month to like literally find their spouse, as in they had a month because that's when they had to go back to the U.S. Haha. So, like during that month somehow, he convinced my mom to marry him and she did.

Interwoven in Hannah's storytelling is a negative view of Korea or Koreans, taking on a xenophobic attitude. This view is reminiscent of the impact internalized racial oppression can have on many minorities who share feelings of shame, self-denial, embarrassment, or even hatred, of the racial aspect of their identities (Trieu and Lee 2018). Because of this negative view of Korea, Hannah believes that it is only natural that an "American" could not be attracted to a "traditional" Korean individual. Having these undesirable elements, it seems, caused her father to look outside of the United States, back in Korea to find another Korean person to marry.

This phenomenon of returning to one's sending country to find a spouse has an extremely long history in the United States, specifically shaped by United States immigration laws that targeted young male laborers. For example, the Naturalization Act of 1906 was the first law in the United States that provided for denaturalization (Agarwal 2018). Prior to this law, immigrants would seek naturalization in state courts, but in 1906 it became a federalized process. Some examples of causes for denaturalization included: fraud, racial ineligibility, and questionable moral character (Agarwal 2018). Furthermore, Congress marked for expatriation all U.S. born citizens who had naturalized in foreign nations and women who had married foreigners. Ellen's narrative of her father calls to mind this legal history where women would have been seriously penalized if they married a foreigner. The 1940 Nationality Act and the 1952

McCarran-Walter Act provided additional reasons for loss of citizenship: voting in foreign elections, serving in the armed forces of another country (Agarwal 2018). Denaturalization has been a part of the fabric of United States law. In January 2018, only months ago, the U.S. Department of Justice revoked Baljinder Singh's citizenship. He was a naturalized Indian American. He was accused of misrepresenting his identity and not disclosing a deportation order on an asylum application, and therefore accused of exploiting the immigration system (Agarwal 2018). From 1907 to the present, denaturalization has happened and is continuing to happen.

With a similar experience as Ellen's parents, Susan, a 38-year-old high school English teacher who grew up in a small town in Ohio, explains how her family settled in the United States, and specifically to the Midwest, and about how her parents met and started their family in the United States:

So, the first person in my family to come to the U.S. was my dad's sister who married a Tae Kwon Do master. She came in 1968 on a special visa because he is a 9th degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do. He actually invented his own style of Tae Kwon Do. And so he came to New York City with my dad's sister and then he was hired by the YMCA in Youngstown for like a permanent position so he moved there and through my dad's sister, she invited her family because you can invite your blood relatives, so my dad came over in 1970ish when he was 19 and he went to college in Youngstown, he went to Youngstown State University. Then in 1975ish he got his heart broken by a white lady. Haha. And then he decided to go back to Korea and do, do you know the sogaeing? The match making? He did like a sogaeing thing and like met my mom and they went on like three dates and they got married. So, their marriage was like totally arranged and then my mom came over in '76. And then I was born a year later. And then, so my mom came to the United States through my dad through marriage. And then her family all immigrated bit by bit during the 80s. So, my entire, all my aunts and uncles and grandparents, everybody has immigrated to the U.S. through, thanks to my Tae Kwon Do uncle. Haha.

These experiences are not only reminiscent of the first waves of immigrants of whom the vast majority were young male laborers who immigrated to the United States, but also of the 'Picture Brides' who were also called to immigrate to the United States. Except that now, with a greater privilege of mobility in comparison to earlier men who immigrated, these men were able to

safely leave the United States to find a spouse in Korea without the fear of not being able to return, legally, to the United States. Hopefully in the future we will still be able to say the same.

There were two exceptions to this pattern of men who returned to Korea to find wives. Janessa, a 19-year-old college student who grew up in Ohio, has a mother whose family immigrated to the United States when she was in middle school, and believes, “my mom might have visited Korea and they had an arranged meeting.” As for her father, “I believe he moved out or he came to America when he got married to my mom.” For this family, it was the woman who returned to Korea to find a spouse, and it was the man who came to the United States to follow his spouse. This is an atypical flow of movement because the majority of respondents had wives who followed their spouses in immigration. For Christina’s family, a 29-year-old mother and current master’s student in Counseling who also grew up in Ohio,

My dad moved here basically after he got married. They were introduced to one another from like a family friend or through a family friend and decided that they would move here after they got married. My mom traveled back and forth until his visa was approved. And that was—I think I was one and a half when he finally made the move. But up until then, we went back and forth to visit.

Christina’s mother also came to the United States early on in life, after finishing middle school, and her family was able to migrate because of an aunt who had married “a Caucasian American,” as Christina describes. These women broke the pattern of men being the ones bringing spouses to them.

There is also a discernible pattern of the types of work that these families had once they have immigrated. As discussed earlier, some families came to the United States to further education, and many continued on to careers that followed that field of education. However, the majority went into the labor of owning small businesses. The most common small businesses amongst my respondents are beauty supply stores, convenience stores, or dry cleaners. There

were also many anomalies to these patterns, that are of note as well. These experiences of work and labor are an important facet to these immigrant's lives, especially understanding their lives when they first arrived in the United States. My respondents' family members worked in a diversity of businesses. They worked for wages in such businesses as in restaurants, in grocery stores, in postal service, as a mechanic, on a cleaning crew, doing assembly line work, as a service technician, doing clothing alterations, and doing research in a factory. Some opened small businesses, such as a donut shop, wig shop, stall in a food court, body shop business, bakery, car wash, clothing store, and handbag business. Some offered their services in fields such as SAT instruction, insurance, real estate, and working in a nursing home. This wide array of jobs shows the types of work that were available for these newly arriving immigrants, and many of these jobs were held by the same person at different or overlapping times.

Conclusion

These respondents' families and their histories of immigration paint a picture of how immigration looks for Korean Americans in the Midwest. These personal narratives also continue on the legacy that began in a relationship between a troubled Korean King and a business minded American missionary. Many of these respondents' families were able to come, and were encouraged to come, because of the networks and microstructures of support that pre-existed (Portes 1999, Massey 1999). Furthermore, the condition of Korea recovering from the Korean War also pushed Koreans to emigrate, paralleling the pattern of emigration caused by Japanese colonialism. These respondents also show that despite not having an ethnic enclave, they were still highly dependent upon social networks of friends and family to bring them to a new place to live. These important and rich narratives highlight how immigration, the movement of peoples, is a personal decision just as much as it is highly affected by economic, political, and

social structures and contexts. The incredibly powerful and complicated history of Korea also fascinatingly tells a clear story of how Korean Americans came to be characterized by their Christian identities.

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CHAPTER 2: BECOMING A BRIDGE THROUGH GOD: MAKING SENSE OF RACIAL MARGINALIZATION

Donald Trump's campaign slogan during his campaigning days, leading into his eventual presidency in 2016, was "Make America Great Again." Harkening back to a cleansed and romanticized understanding of the United States, Trump's mantra implies that the United States that we see now is different from, meaning worse than, the United States of the past (Blake 2017, Engel 2017). However, the respondents of my project make clear that this allegedly "Great America" of the past may not have been as pristine as Trump remembers, or as he wants his supporters to believe. The United States of the 1970s and 1980s, when most of my respondent's family's first immigrated, did not offer a welcoming embrace to Asians or Asian Americans. This nation was still in an emotional upheaval, attempting to recover from the war in Vietnam, as well as the economic and energy crises of the time. Also, in the auto-manufacturing regions (many in the Midwest) of the nation, the anger and disappointment that came from the condition of these economic pains became focused specifically on the commodities, and the people, of Asia (or related to Asia in any way) (Zia 2000). As my respondents' families immigrated to the United States from Korea, their transition and experience to the United States was in this strained and tense context, trying to understand what it means to be in America and to be an American. The children of these families, decades later, still attempt to understand what it means to be American.

With this context and backdrop, it is undeniable that Asian Americans in the Midwest have experienced prejudice, discrimination, and racism in many forms (Furiya 2006, Huping 2008, Lee 2009, Nguyen 2008, Wei 1992, Wilkinson and Jew 2015). While some respondents from my project did state that they have not experienced any explicit kind of othering (prejudice,

discrimination, or racism), many have had significant and traumatic experiences of othering. For many, to respond to these negative and painful experiences without a self-defeating attitude, hopelessness or helplessness, required perseverance, strength, experience, and time. Moreover, to respond in productive and constructive ways is incredibly challenging. Some Asian Americans (Phil Yu, Grace Lee Boggs, Yuri Kochiyama, Aoki, among many others) have even devoted their entire lives and careers to such an agenda and cause, and there is still work to be done (angryasianman.com, Omatsu 2015, Fujino 2005, Fujino 2012).

For those individuals who have experienced marginalization, now what? How do they make sense of their experiences of othering? And what do they do about it? There are a multitude of ways to respond to these experiences. The focus of this chapter is those various responses. The central finding highlights the critical role of church and religion as one such avenue for change. Many respondents discuss a shared vision of being a “bridge” between cultures, identities, generations, and nations to help heal from marginalization and othering, specifically through the Korean immigrant church. This chapter will also specifically examine how Korean Americans view and make sense of their ethnic identities through a religious perspective. This exploration will include negative responses to identity formation as Korean Americans, including internalized racial oppression. This project reveals the role of space and place through the eyes of the individuals who experiences its influence. While Trump may have contributed to a national consciousness of warmth and nostalgia, my respondents share a different story, and break down the notion that America used to be great. The space and place of the Midwest for Korean Americans of this study is filled with discrimination and racism—the respondents attempt to handle that as best they can, with the resources they have access to.

Immigrants, their Children, and Religion

Immigration and religion scholars have long been interested in generations of immigrants and the role of religion. Attention has been paid to the characteristics of the various generations (primarily first and second) as well as the relationship between the generations, parents and children, and how religion is utilized as a space to negotiate relationship between the generations (Cadge and Ecklund 2007). Herberg's (1955) classic text on religion and immigration argued that the first generation would abandon certain elements of their ethnicity such as language and tradition, but that religion would remain because religion permits them to "melt" into America's 'triple melting pot:' Protestants, Catholics, Jews. He also argues that second-generation immigrants will be less religious than the first, and that the third generation would return to religion (the 'third generation return').

More recent scholarship have move beyond white European immigrants to address the second-generation and their relationship with the first-generation in churches. Predictions were once made that the second-generation would leave religion altogether, particularly when talking about Asian Americans, what scholars once called "the silent exodus" (Cha 2001). However, this theory has since been contested. Numerous studies have found that the second-generation Americans have not left religion behind (Alumkal 1999, Kim 2004, Min and Kim 2005). Additionally, Smith's (1998) argument for a subcultural identity theory challenges the general concern that scholars had of religion, that pluralism would destroy religion and be its demise. Out of this, Smith (1998) makes the argument that evangelicalism in fact thrives on tension and conflict and threat. Smith writes, "We also hope to extend the paradigm's scope of analysis beyond inter-religious pluralism and competition to sociocultural pluralism and conflict more broadly; beyond the entrepreneurial work of religious elites to the experience of ordinary

religious believers generally...” (Smith 1998). This theorizing is also important for contextualizing how it is that ethnic churches exist, when it could be seen that there are forces that make it difficult for them to thrive.

In challenging the fear of the ‘silent exodus,’ Zhou and Bankston (1996) have argued that in fact, the ethnic church enhances ethnic identity by bringing together co-ethnics and strengthening ethnic identity. Their focus is the Vietnamese adolescent ethnic population, and their conclusion is that immigrant congregations should be seen as a means to promote adaptation to American society by encouraging ethnic group membership, an argument that differs significantly from the argument Cha (2001) makes (Zhou and Bankston 1996).

How do space, place and environment influence the religious identities and practices of immigrants? Especially with recent attention drawn to new immigrant gateways or new settlement states, missing in the discourse is whether these new immigrant destinations also influence religious identity and practice, and whether there are differences across various religions. In Alper and Olson’s (2013) scholarship on Jewish Americans in smaller population share areas, they find that population share *does* impact identity formations and salience of identities. What scholarship in immigration and religion already acknowledge is that religion is an important aspect of immigrant life in the U.S. Thus, it is also important for studies to address the role of religion, religious identities among immigrant populations living in new destination cities.

The Role of the Korean Church in Korean Americans’ Lives

Scholarship on religion among Korean Americans has explored gender politics in the church, transmission of culture to the second-generation through religion, the function of ethnic identity in the church, the role of the church in Korean America, its history, and religiosity

amongst the second-generation. Scholars, largely from sociology and history, have researched and examined the meanings of such aspects of Korean American identity for decades, and recognize its importance in better understanding who Korean Americans are and how that is shaped by religion. However, these explorations largely study Korean Americans in areas highly populated by Korean Americans, many having ethnic enclaves and enterprises. One area of research that some scholars (Alper and Olson 2013, Gozdzia and Martin 2005, Park 2013) pose as areas for further study, that has not been adequately addressed, is whether these arguments hold true where Korean Americans do not have access to co-ethnic populations and communities. Park (2013) suggests, “Further research should consider exploring these patterns in other contexts where Korean Americans are fewer in number, and where the opportunities to find a marital spouse with the same ethnicity or participate in a second-generation congregation are scarce.” Similarly, Kang et al. (2010) writes about the need in future research to look at Korean American youth who have little exposure to ethnic communities. This is also a critical time in Asian American studies where questions of regionalism are being asked and explored. The Association for Asian American Studies’ 2015 annual conference in Evanston, Illinois, was “The Trans/national Imaginary: Global cities and racial borderlands,” where one of their proposed questions was “How have their settlement patterns shifted the spatial imaginary towards not only the urban but also the suburban and rural? How do Asian/Americans and Pacific Islanders transfigure the “heartlands” of American into “borderlands”? This chapter aims to be a part of this discussion to better understand Asian Americans who grew up in the Midwest.

As Yoo (2010) discusses, the Korean Christian Church of Honolulu and the Korean Methodist Church of LA were two of the earliest and most influential Korean immigrant churches in the early 1900s. Yoo (2010) documents how these churches handled the rise of the

earliest second-generation that was coming of age around the 1930s. What Yoo documents from these early second-generation Korean Americans and their church experiences is echoed in today's second-generation Korean American experiences. Adjustments had to be made to integrate the second-generation into the church; for example, English language services were instituted, and music was altered. The church also influenced how the second-generation viewed themselves ethnically, nationally and politically because the church was not only a religious center but also a political, social, and economic one. Such histories are important for showcasing the process of adaptation for the second-generation in the earliest Korean American churches as well as highlighting the multifaceted role of the church in the lives of early Korean immigrants.

Min and Kim (2005) explore the extent to which Korean Protestant immigrants in the U.S. transmit religious and cultural traditions through religion to the second-generation. This study surveys 1.5- and second-generation Korean Americans and congregations in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area. Min and Kim (2005) identify the main struggle of the first-generation in church to be the transmission of ethnic culture to the next generation because the second-generation questions the act of prioritizing culture at the expense of religious values and practices. This scholarship adds to the current discussions of immigrant religion and ethnic identity retention because up to this point there has not been data on the proportion of second-generation Korean adults' affiliation with and participation in a Korean congregation, nor on the rate at which second-generation English-language congregations retain Korean cultural traditions in worship services and socio-cultural activities. The central conclusion made by Min and Kim (2005), based on their survey data is that the first-generation transmitted religion to their children, but not cultural traditions through religion. The lack of expansion of the definition of culture in their study offers opportunities for further development of the term. Min and Kim

speak primarily of culture and socio-cultural activities in terms of language, food, and musical styles. However, how culture is defined is extremely important before determining how it is practiced and what is retained, it also begs the question of what is Korean culture versus Korean American culture, and how and who gets to determine which is *authentic*. For the second-generation Korean Americans, culture may have been redefined and hybridized in ways that the first generation may not recognize. Culture may be defined differently depending on population share and the access to co-ethnic populations.

Gender, family, and patriarchy are important concepts that are often shaped and visibly practiced within religious contexts. Alumkal (1999) presents an ethnographic study of a second-generation Korean American Protestant church congregation in New York that focuses on how religion influences assimilation in terms of gender and family norms. Alumkal uses participant observation and formal interview data in his study. The central conclusion is that these individuals maintained commitment to patriarchal gender norms and supported these views with discourse that is found in American evangelical theology rather than ethnic or cultural language. Alumkal's findings disrupt previously held understandings of gender and family in Korean American religious communities. Prior studies showed that Confucianism as an ideology justified patriarchal hierarchy. Alumkal found that the congregation justified their view of family with biblical and religious reasoning rather than cultural tradition, which again possibly points to a distinction between Korean American and Korean cultures. The findings show that there is not a clear trajectory from patriarchy to egalitarianism in terms of gender norms. The second-generation maintains commitment to gender hierarchy through religion and not culture in a religious setting, which would seem to be supported by Min and Kim's (2005) findings. This seems to be a consistent pattern that the second-generation emphasizes their religious identity

over their ethnic identity in their beliefs, though they still prefer to practice religion with others that share their ethnic identity.

In looking at the history of the Korean American or Korean immigrant church in the United States, it is abundantly clear that the church served a multitude of purposes. The religious and spiritual aspect of the church was only one dimension of this space. The communal aspect of the church gave the earliest immigrants hope and encouragement when acceptance out in society seemed bleak and impossible. This community provided economic support, space for political voices to be expressed and supported, transnational participation and communication, as well as tips and tricks for survival and daily living (Chan 1991, Chan 1990, Yoo and Chung 2008, Yoo 2010). Some respondents looked at the church for another purpose, to address gaps between the first- and second-generations, the gap between Korean and American identity, and the sense and experiences of being an outsider in society. Each of these purposes intersect religious identity with racial and ethnic identities. To see this intersection through the following respondents' lives reveals a powerful potential of the role of the church in social injustices, and the importance of addressing ethnic and racial identity in a religious setting.

Inequality, Racism, Injustice, Education

On the matter of forgotten or suppressed injustices, Tong (2006) writes, "Given what scholars of memory have uncovered, it is not surprising that [Wayne Hung] Wong in his early version of the autobiography did not mention at all the instances of racial discrimination he and his family experienced in Wichita...he could insist that he had experienced hardly any racial discrimination in Wichita, although later interviews revealed he and his family did experience hostility both within and without Wichita" (p. 120). It is not uncommon for painful and traumatic

histories to be repressed and for individuals to instead choose to recall more favorable histories (“Make America Great Again”). It is in these tensions that I believe the history is most revealing.

Sue and Sue (2013) in the field of counseling psychology, quote an Asian American individual with similar sentiments as Wong, nearly seventy years later, “White privilege was a concept I was unaware of, even though it was intricately woven into the fabric of my life. If someone had asked me then, I would probably have said that I have not experienced racism, and I did not feel oppressed in any way. This is not to say I had not experienced racism... I reacted to racial microaggressions with confusion, fear, and frustration, although I never understood my emotions” (Lo 2010 as quoted in Sue and Sue 2013: 402). Showing a similar sentiment across time (through Wong and Lo) not only indicates a history of unrecognized racism but also the reality of it.

Microaggressions are “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to a target group, such as people of color; religious minorities; women; people with disability; and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered individuals. These microaggressions are often subtle in nature and can be manifested in the verbal, nonverbal, visual, or behavioral realm. They are often enacted automatically and unconsciously, although the person who delivers the microaggression can do so intentionally or unintentionally” (Sue and Sue 2013: 150). Microaggressions are everyday experiences that can often be hidden from understanding because they are subtle and can be unintentional and even subconsciously enacted. These microaggressions are connected to the absence of education and politicization (in academia, Asian American studies came much later to the Midwest than in other regions of the U.S. Not until 1989 did the first Asian American studies program in the Midwest become institutionalized (Lee 2009: 251)).

Another manifestation of racism is internalized racial oppression. Internalized racial oppression pushes individuals to struggle with “racial and ethnic self-doubt and belonging and [harbor] a sense of shame and inferiority. These are all thoughts and behaviors associated with the reproduction of racial inequality, and it reflects how racial subordinates have internalized their own racial oppression (Pyke 2010)” (Trieu and Lee 2018). The experience of oppression and racism can lead people to question their own identities and begin believing that they are the inferior people that their oppressors tell them they are. This in turn leads them to exude self-doubt and self-hatred (Trieu and Lee 2018). The respondents in this chapter, continue to share this history of racism and the reality of it in the Midwest, even today, and internalized racial oppression is not uncommon in these narratives.

Susan: Consequences of Racism and a Hope from Trauma

Susan, a 38-year-old high school English literature teacher who grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, and Yorktown, Virginia, shared devastating experiences of racism from her youth in Ohio, as well as the trauma of enduring her father’s sudden passing in her teenage years. Susan’s life shows the severe consequences of a racist environment and experiencing racism first-hand, the hope of seizing the opportunity to positively influence society despite these experiences, as well as how the Korean church can be a powerful space for healing (discussed later). Susan, her two younger sisters and her parents were able to come to the United States through her uncle’s immigration sponsorship of them. This uncle was able to receive a special visa to the United States because of his ninth-degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do, which led him first to New York City. Shortly afterwards, he was hired by the YMCA (The Young Men’s Christian Association) in Youngstown, Ohio. Growing up in Youngstown in the 1980s, Susan went to an elementary school that she describes as being “seventy percent black and thirty-ish percent white” in a

neighborhood that was racially segregated. In this context, her neighbor's family would not allow Susan into their home because "they were very racist against Asian people." Susan's mother described their neighbor's father's attitude towards Susan twenty years later saying that, "her dad hated you and they wouldn't let you in. I was so mad they didn't let you in her house!" This kind of racism was only the tip of the iceberg of what Susan would experience in Youngstown. During elementary school, in order to protect Susan "from getting beat up every day," the principal gave Susan chores to do in the office during recess. Susan describes her daily encounter with bullying and assault:

Like every single day in recess the kids would chase me. And I remember running circles and circles around the school yard to get away from these kids who'd follow me and I would try to get to the teacher. And the teachers would never protect me, like they would just be like 'go away, go play or do something.' And so finally the principal, it came to a head that the kids jumped me and we had this really bad fight. After that, I suddenly had an office job. Like oh, you get to be in the office and count out all the papers, like the construction papers for all the teachers. I actually loved that job because I was *safe* [emphasis added]. I was so paranoid by that point of getting attacked and so I loved [my principal] for giving me that job. There was this one time too like, you know for a long time I was embarrassed about Korean stuff. I didn't want anything to do with Korean. I was so, cause kids would make fun of me all the time, and so my mom made kimbap for like Cultural Day and [the principal] was like, 'OMG I love this stuff' and ate it all. I almost cried. I felt so. I never saw anyone appreciate my culture like that. That was really hard. And then middle school was worse. Like middle school was on the bus every day like the kids would sing this song. It was like 'my name is Connie Chung and I'm a reporter. I get my pearl cream from cross the border' They like sang every day! So I sit by myself and they would sing that song. And like I would be like walking from the bus stop and there was like other, like the bus from St. Christine's, like another school, they would go by and scream horrible things at me. I used to hide in my neighbor's bushes all the time. I'd see the bus and I'd run behind my neighbor's bushes and hide. But by the time I get to high school, [my friend] is a year older than me, but school-wise, she's two years ahead. So by the time we got to high school, we were in the same school. And [my friend] protected me. So I didn't have hardly any of the racial issues that I had in elementary school and middle school. Cause [my friend] was always ahead of me, she could never, but by the time I got there, I knew a lot of [my friend's] friends and [my friend] was kind of popular and her family was popular. She had two older siblings on top of that and they, I mean it wasn't just [my friend], it was other people, but yeah, it was a lot better in high school. And then we moved away.

Susan's story shows intense emotional and psychological consequences to being the victim of racism, interpersonally and institutionally. Susan's encounters with bullying and assault led her to desire distance from her ethnic identity, internalizing the oppression she was put under. Her story also exemplifies the empowerment of having one's identity and culture acknowledged, accepted, celebrated, even through something like food. The role of these particular individuals, her principal and her friend, was critical in Susan overcoming the wounds of racism. Susan's story is a reminder of the severity of racism, and how community and acceptance can be essential for healing.

Unfortunately, Susan's younger sisters were not immune to this kind of bullying and assault. Susan continued to share how this assault was not an isolated experience:

I have two younger sisters, one's four years younger and the other's six years younger. [Andrea] was 8 when she left so she doesn't have a lot of memories plus she was majorly traumatized by my dad's passing so she doesn't remember much but [Olivia], who's the middle one, when she was in kindergarten, she had to go to the principal's office because some girl was choking her on the bus and the girl was like, it was a racist reason like 'oh, you're Asian and like stupid.' There was a lot of hostility in the 80's against Asians in that area because of Japanese cars. Because that area is a big car making area, like American cars, so there was a lot of hostility. There were people in our church, they got their tires slashed. There was just in general, people didn't like Asians. She'll never forget that. So [Olivia] lives in California now and she has sworn that she'll never live anywhere in the Midwest ever again, in fact she's planning to move to Hawaii because she wants to be in a place where, this sounds horrible, please don't judge my sister, but she wants to live in a place where white people aren't.

There are many important elements to this family's narrative that illustrate the widespread racism and violence that Korean Americans, and Asian Americans more generally, have experienced throughout the history of the United States (Almaguer 1994, Kim 2003, Lee 2015). Asians and Asian Americans in the Midwest are clearly no exception to this experience (Lee 2009, Nguyen 2008, Wilkinson and Jew 2015, Zia 2001). Though this racism did not start with these young children, it must be recognized that this level of hatred and fear of difference does

exist even amongst very young children. As Kiang and Supple (2016) remind us, “At a more extreme level, racism and related mechanisms could serve as major obstacles in Asian Americans’ community integration.” Furthermore, the reaction that Susan received from her teachers reinforce statistics of discrimination experienced by Asian American youth in the Southeastern U.S. that, “13% of individuals describing situations in which a teacher or school authority figure treated them differently because of their race or ethnicity” (Kiang and Supple 2016). Susan suffered to integrate into her school and neighborhood environments. However, Susan also shows the importance of having an embracing community and friendships in recalling her white friend’s help, a relationship powerful enough to protect her from harm. In retelling her sister’s history, that violence persisted in an extremely abusive and forceful way.

Susan also shares another moment in Asian American history that was brought to national attention in the early 1980s by the brutal and devastating murder of a young Chinese American named Vincent Chin who was beaten to death with a baseball bat in the middle of the street because he was mistaken for being Japanese by two white auto workers who had been laid off. For this brutal murder they did not spend a day in jail (Choy and Tajima, 1989; Chin and Lam, 2009; Wilkinson and Jew 2015, Wu 2012). Due to the global economy, specifically in the auto industry, this was a time of heightened anti-Japanese, even anti-Asian, sentiment. What began as a fear of the Japanese auto industry overtaking the American auto industry, became inseparable from the fear of “yellow peril” (Almaguer 1994, Zia 2001). When asked, Susan did not know about this particular incident in Detroit, Michigan, but her retelling points exactly to this national history and to how the hatred of Asians and Asian Americans was rampant. She is explaining the fear that white America had of “Asians,” during the 1980s due to the import of Japanese cars. According to Choy and Tajima’s (1989) Academy Award nominated documentary

Who Killed Vincent Chin?, the news media showed individuals beating up Japanese cars with sledgehammers, which parallels what Susan saw (the slashing of tires of Korean people's cars). What was happening in the global economy was mapped directly on to individuals that appeared "Asian."

Susan and her sister responded to this larger history and their personal experiences in differing ways. For Olivia, the Midwest space, geographically and contextually, is directly associated with and even responsible for the pain and trauma she had to endure, which has led her to swear she will never to return to the Midwest. Instead, she has chosen to live in California and hopes to move to Hawaii. In a similar way, after moving to Virginia, Susan explains that her experience there, in her high school years, was much better due to population size. She shares:

[It was much better in Virginia because of the] much larger Asian population. So in my high school there were like 4 or 5 Korean people, which is huge. Haha. Quite a few Chinese and Filipino, so there were more Asians and definitely because we moved to a military area, there were a lot of people who had experience actually living in Asia or with Asian people, so it was not so much we were these aliens. I always felt like, people think I'm crazy when I say this, but this is the truth, you go to a place in Youngstown, like a new, like you walk into a store or room, everybody stops what they are doing and looks at you. It happens all the time. And so, I was really paranoid when I would go into a room of strangers. I always felt like my eyes got smaller or that lasted for a long time after I left Ohio, where I felt like people were staring at me all the time.

These experiences Susan had are far from forgotten. They linger, haunt and remain.

Susan makes the point that being around not only a larger (relatively) Asian population, but also being around people who are familiar with seeing and living alongside Asian individuals, contributed greatly to the psychological ease of her experience as a racial minority. As she says, "Virginia was a lot better..." These decisions that people make about how they live and where they live can be a result of experiences they have, provided they have the privilege to choose. Furthermore, for these women, the Midwest equals experiences of racism, and for Olivia they are experiences she wants to live very far away from. Susan had a very different long-term response;

she explains: “I think a lot of my studies and my work and my career has taught me a lot of healing and how to better understand racial and cultural competency. So I’m more of like a problem solver in terms of that, but my sister’s like, I’m just never going to go back.” Later she expanded on how she wants to be that kind of problem solver, “I think that’s kind of why I decided to become a teacher too is that like I work really hard to try to change the society to make it a better society than what I experienced.” Susan has a very different route and way of processing, understanding, and handling the past. This route was possible for Susan because of her studies and her work, the healing began with education and learning before becoming a problem solver. Susan’s life and experiences are horrific to imagine, but also hope-giving, that out of this kind of pain, there are ways to recover and heal and survive.

“I am a Bridge”: Korean American Identity as a Blessing

The first step to finding the solution to any problem is first fully understanding the nuances of the problem, which can happen through education. Trieu (2009) argues in her work that ethnic studies and even involvement in ethnic organizations (both as forms of being educated) plays a critical role in one’s identity formation and development. In her research on Chinese-Vietnamese Americans, it is clear that college students who were educated through Asian American Studies and/or participation in ethnic organizations were able to intentionally and purposefully choose how they identify. Furthermore, Trieu and Lee (2018) uncover how internalized racial oppression is not static as previous literature discussed, but rather, is fluid. The processes that allow for shifting out of the perpetuation of internalized racial oppression is critical exposure to ethnic and racial history, ethnic organizations, and co-ethnic ties. The following respondent intentionally and purposefully chose how she identifies, as a result of critical exposure to education, but not through ethnic studies. Rather, Cecilia’s understanding of

her ethnic and racial identity is grounded in her religion, and specifically in her education from seminary. The role of religion in critical exposure adds an important nuance to the role that education can play in identity formation.

Cecilia, a 27-year-old second-generation Korean American who was born and raised in Ohio, did share experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination in her youth and decided to attend a seminary program to study theology and become an ordained pastor. It was through her time in seminary that she came to view herself as Korean American, and where she gained confidence in her identity. In fact, it was through seminary, which she attends in Ohio, that she explains, “I made some really good friends at my seminary that have really helped me to identify kind of the racial prejudice against Asian Americans that exists. I’ve known that they were there but never really paid much attention to it. So I’ve had my Korean American identity reaffirmed while I was at seminary.” Moreover, it was in the classroom that she was able to process and understand the racism she experienced,

One of our assignments was to create a blog post about our experiences...There’s one in particular that talks about my experience with microaggressions. And I realized when writing that blog post, I realized that that was the first time I actually put down into words what I had experienced from my own microaggressions. And I realized that I had never fully and consciously done that. I’d say I knew that it was there. I knew that they existed. But that was the first time I had put it into real words.

Specifically, she shares the kinds of microaggressions she experienced, such as being constantly asked “where are you *really* from?” which her co-ethnics in church also experienced. This type of microaggression that she faced is a reminder of the persistence of racialization for Asian Americans, and the imposition of the othering label “forever foreigner” on Asian Americans (Chan 1991, Kim 1999, Takaki 1989, Tuan 2001). In fact, sharing those experiences of microaggressions amongst her peers in her church youth group brought them closer together, “Like we’ve all had those experiences so when we talk about it at church, like it’s just, we *know*,

we understand all of that. We get all of that.” There was an understanding there that Cecilia did not have to explain, and one that she finally confronted head on during her schooling in seminary.

Through her experience and observation serving as a youth pastor at a Korean American church, she identified one problem as the gap between the first- and second-generations. She explains that in the churches she has observed, the second-generation is not unwelcome, but they are not actively included in the Korean American church, either. For Cecilia, she believes it is through religious identity that the tension between Korean and American identity can be reconciled. In her own words, Cecilia stated, “But I think it’ll be important and this is where my future ministry to do is, to reconcile the difference between being Korean and being American. What does it mean to be Korean American? And how do we fit that within our larger identity as God’s children.” Cecilia’s words show her definition and understanding of Korean American identity, that for her it is viewed as a tension between a conflicting binary. Her statement highlights that there is an issue to be “reconciled” between these two identities. It leads to the perpetual question of what it means to be Korean American. For Cecilia, she takes the question further by asking “how do we fit that within our larger identity as God’s children?” This question implies that ethnic and racial identity is not the primary identity for her because the first and foremost identity should be as a Christian, as God’s child.

Furthermore, if Korean American identity it is not the primary identity, then as a Christian, where does this ethnic identity fit? Though Cecilia does not have answers to this question yet, her first step is in asking. One proposed solution for Cecilia is “I think I would rather say that I am a bridge between these two cultures. And by being that bridge, I can help future generations of Korean Americans be, also be a bridge and help them to reconcile these

differences within their identity.” Her knowledge and education and presence are what she hopes will be of help to the second-generation and beyond. She shares what her experiences are and how they can be of help, “So it was just a kind of bitter reminder, thinking when I don’t belong anywhere, a bitter reminder of how lonely I felt growing up. But then I moved on to think it’s not a bad thing that I don’t necessarily belong. It’s a gift that God has given me and to be able to see both good and bad of both cultures. And that has given me this unique call to be this bridge between the cultures.” Her religious identity, and making that her primary identity, permitted her a way to accept and celebrate her ethnic and racial identity, and resolve the cultural tension between being Korean and American. From Cecilia we can see that this social aspect of the church did not cease in importance since the earliest immigrant churches, and that it is still a necessity today. Cecilia’s narrative and experience show how the ethnic church provides comfort and community, but being educated on issues of racial and ethnic identity alongside growing up with co-ethnics in the church can be an even more powerful means of strengthening ethnic identity.

Doug uses the same vocabulary that Cecilia uses to describe what he sees as an opportunity to meet a particular need in the community. He is a 33-year-old father and Associate Pastor who grew up in Illinois and Wisconsin for the longest length of time. He then spent time in New York, and has most recently landed in California with his family for a pastoral position. For Doug, there are transnational implications for the role of Korean Americans in the church, and like Cecilia, he sees uniqueness in being Korean American. Doug says,

I feel like Korean Americans have such a unique position in terms of being the *bridge* [emphasis added]. In terms of seeing—kinda bringing a new wave of what God is doing in churches in Korea. For example, a lot of conversation that’s happening, I feel like in the Korean churches, is we are losing our Korean American population, the second-generation. So they’re looking for Korean American pastors and leaders to kind of emerge and be part of the conversations that are taking place. And that’s where I’m

realizing like, “Wow, being a Korean American has such a vital part in what God is doing in America as well as in Korea.” And I think also, being in Southern California, an emergence of Korean food being a part of like—it’s so popularized now. It’s so cool, because I feel like I can now—people are now interested, people are much more globally-minded.

Doug thinks about the connection between ethnic and religious identity and implies that there is a close relationship between Korean American identity and the Church (as well as religious identity). Each identity is seen as potential to be used as a tool for a greater purpose. Seeing Korean culture become more recognized in mainstream American culture to Doug shows a greater interest and openness to Korean Americans, and an opportunity of growth for the Korean American church. The long history and prominent role of the Protestant church in Korea has also led to the importance of the church in Korean American communities. The present problem that Doug discusses is this apparent decrease in church attendance of the second-generation population. Doug’s assessment of the Korean church is the same as Cha (2001), the departure of the second-generation. This decrease has spurred an increase in demand for second-generation Korean American pastors and leaders in the church, because their identity can serve as a bridge *within* the church, and *between* the church and those outside the church.

Like Cecilia, Doug also talks about how he makes sense of his experiences of prejudice and othering. When asked to explain whether he has experienced forms of racism, he said:

Absolutely. In both—in two ways, in both ways. As a Korean, like from Koreans, I’ve experienced discrimination. Um...and from Americans, I’ve experienced discrimination. It’s like, I definitely think like, for example in Kentucky, it wasn’t among the student body, but it was definitely among like the ‘hillbillies’ and ‘hicks’ in the surrounding areas. You know? I would say so. But the interesting thing is, even...coming out here [to California from Illinois and Wisconsin and most recently Kentucky], I would say discrimination, it doesn’t come out in this hatred. It’s not like violent or anything. But I feel like I’m put in a box. Like, ‘He’s a Korean. He looks like Korean. And he’s a pastor. So he’s probably like all the Korean pastors that I’ve encountered here in southern California or perhaps even in Korea.’”

The discrimination he describes as coming from other Koreans is an example of how Doug has experienced one of the manifestations of internalized racial oppression, the oppression of others that share the same ethnic or racial identity. His experience as being “put in a box” as a Korean pastor, also shows that there are stereotypes of what a “Korean pastor from southern California” is like. Differently from Cecilia, Doug handles these experiences of discrimination by trying to assume the best of the ignorant individuals he may encounter, and by seeing these encounters as teaching moments to expose others to his story, and to his culture. Doug explains:

I think because of just being surrounded by other Americans and being constantly in this tension in my life, where I finally have to be like, “Okay. You know what? I need to learn how to share my story. I need to learn how to share my culture. Like they’re not out to get me.” This air of suspicion that they’re racist or whatever, but they just don’t know. Being able to share that life together, I think that’s helped me kind of do that. And I feel quite frankly, coming out to southern California, I feel much more comfortable having a diverse group of friends and developing friendships with them. Like I need my white friends around me, you know?

Changing his attitude towards others in this way while growing up in the Midwest has encouraged him to be more open to difference when he moved to southern California. His concluding statement here expresses his openness to friendships with white individuals in particular, showing that he is not closed off from non-Korean individuals. This attitude towards non-Koreans adds nuance to the findings of Park (2013), who examined the extent to which religion acts to preserve ethnicity and even support insularity in 1.5 and second-generation Korean Americans, based on survey data from Los Angeles in 2004. Park’s study finds that second-generation Korean Americans have the highest intraracial marriage rate and also the highest intraethnic marriage rate of all Asian groups in his sample. Furthermore, his research finds that religiously married second-generation Korean Americans have the highest racially homogenous composition rate in the congregations that they attend, relative to other racial groups and other Asian ethnicities (Park 2013). For Doug, although he desires and even

promotes diverse friendships, he himself has married a Korean American woman and has chosen to serve and attend a Korean American church community. Park (2013) suggests for further research that this pattern be tested in areas where Korean Americans may not have access to co-ethnic populations. Doug's story, as well as many other respondents, show that despite not having ethnic enclaves near their homes in the Midwest, many hope to (if they are not yet married) and have married other ethnically Korean individuals. This suggests that the insularity of second-generation Korean Americans that Park has found, may extend even to areas of low population share. At the very end of his interview, Doug took time to further emphasize how his religion and religious identity affirms his ethnic and racial identity:

Yeah I think being in, I think for me being a Korean American, I think it really, I feel like I understand how Korean I am or how American I am or how Christian or how unchristian I am. It really depends on where I am. I realized. I'm almost able to see the difference and feel the difference and realize that wow I am this way. I am more American this way. And so I think quite frankly I used to hate that. Because I think before I want to fit in. I wanted to be a part of something. But now it's like, you know what, I see the advantage of that. It sometimes may feel lonely. It may feel discouraging. But I see the advantage cause I do believe that Korean Americans have a place where especially with the church, it's going to be so vital. We're gonna be that bridge. We're gonna be able to, and I think as Korean Americans, for me I had to work through a lot of my own prejudices towards being American and Korean to really understand, ok, this is something I need to celebrate. And so it's I don't know, I think that's what Korean American Christian especially, our, when I see what God is doing among Korean American Christians, I feel that's what God is doing. It's not solidifying what it means to be Korean American, because I think that's gonna be so different, but I think it's just seeing the advantage as a people, what are we called for? So.

He experienced the loneliness of not belonging and for him, he was able to channel that energy into accepting and celebrating his difference, specifically under the plan of his God.

Interestingly, a third individual uses the same verbiage and imagery in describing his role as well as the role of Korean Americans as a whole, in the church. John is a 30-year-old who was born in Seoul, Korea, but moved to the United States to Dayton, Ohio, at the age of fifteen, and

has only left Ohio for a couple of years to study in seminary in Kentucky. John specifically states:

I feel like Korean Americans are just separate, they're a distinct identity—you know, they're not really Koreans, they're not really Americans. But we both appreciate both cultures, and we can serve both cultures and help them *bridge* the gap [emphasis added]. And that was part of my call as well, coming into ministry, I'm the bridge between generations. And there's a need for that as well. And I think being a Korean American can serve that area.

Speaking for the community as a whole in this manner, reveals how John defines Korean American identity. In stating “we,” he implies a singular and homogeneous Korean American community who all appreciates American and Korean culture equally. This language and definition may not include those who actually do not share his appreciation of both cultures, and who may prioritize one culture over another, or who may not care for either culture. Furthermore, John believes that it is this appreciation that allows him to be a bridge between the first- and second-generations; that the first-generation appreciates Korean culture better and perhaps the second-generation appreciates American culture better, therefore having an understanding of both and utilizing that can be a strategic move. Moreover, it is within the church that he sees his role being practiced because of the particular problem within a church and religious setting. In looking forward, John sees a bright future for the Korean American church:

I feel like God has—I think about it a lot, how I ended up in ministry. Even in coming to the US, I feel like God orchestrated in mysterious ways, for me to come here in Ohio, out of all the states and all the cities. Specifically, look through all this stuff, hang out with—you know, be part of the church, go through that experience and environment. God has really formed me and led me in a certain way. So I'm realizing it more now that who I am now is not really based on my decisions and my goals. But it's more of God meeting in a way, going through different things. Because right now, there's a need for Korean Americans to find their own churches. They grew up in Korean churches, but it was their parents' church. They were always part of youth group. After youth group, a lot of kids fall away, because they couldn't even find that group in college. Even if they do, they're exposed to other things, they don't have that community to be accountable with. That's part of my calling, to talk to those people who grew up in church. Also a lot of Korean Americans are coming back to church, and after having their own kids and forming

families, they don't feel like they belong to American church. Or they're starting to form their own Korean American churches. It's happening, but there's a bigger need.

Another aspect that connects these respondents and their desire to reach out to the Korean American population within the Korean American church is their 'call' to ministry. Their 'calls' align their experience as Korean American Christians, desires, with their religious beliefs and identity. This religious terminology of a 'call' speaks to the depth of their religious identity. By saying this, they mean that they believe that God has led them somewhere for a particular purpose (Harvey 2012). For these individuals, they believe God has led them to work in a Korean American church with the purpose of helping both first- and second-generation Korean Americans. For each of them, their upbringing, immigration histories, religious beliefs, and experiences with prejudice and racism and being made to feel less than in one way or another, all intersect and played a role in developing their care for this population in this particular way.

Daniel, a 33-year-old who was born in Louisiana and lived in Cincinnati since the age of six is another individual who went to seminary with the goal of becoming a pastor. He went with the desire and objective to serve "third culture kids, the misfits, and the unaccepted." The term "third culture kids," refers to "kids who have come 'home' after living abroad as dependents of parents who are employed overseas. Although they have grown up in foreign countries, they are not integral parts of those countries. When they come to their country of citizenship (some for the first time), they do not feel at home because they do not know the lingo or expectations of others—especially those of their own age" (Useem and Downie 2011). Daniel has particularly connected his childhood and youth experience in the Midwest with giving him the insight, perspective and desire to help these groups. Daniel shared:

Continuing through elementary school, grew up in a white rural neighborhood. Was one of very few Asians at school, outside of myself and my brother. Lived close to a very, for lack of a better term, trailer-trash town that went to our school. Got a lot of 'chink,'

basically a lot of racial slurs. Plus, I was chubby, so I got a lot of chubby jokes. So, I know that that um...yeah okay so, that continued through probably early junior high and I decided to not take it anymore. So, I became angry, and at the same time, that was fueling my rebellion towards my parents. Like the chasm started to form between me, myself and my parents. Um...yeah, I just lived angry for forever. I went to college angry. Fell away from God. Oh yeah, so all the while growing up in church, fell away from God in college.

For Daniel, the roots of these early experiences of racism remained for a significant amount of time. These very early experiences of racism led to brokenness in his religion and in his relationship with his parents. Out of this, the Korean ethnic church would become a critical space of healing for Daniel:

Most of our [his church friend group] friends were Asian, close friends. And then I did obviously have some Caucasian friends in school too, but you know, I had a mistrust for them, because I was made fun of a lot. So a lot of my energy went towards my church friends because we were alike. That was the easy thing to do. We all probably had, to some extent, things in common, we were alienated because we were different, living in ruralish white areas. So I think we all related to that. Brought us together. And you know, whether some of the guys will admit it, God brought us together. Like that relationship that we were able to form in church really helped us, you know, get some deep roots.

He explains that being an outsider in the Midwest as a young Korean American was a strong factor that brought him closer to God and gave him purpose and direction. These experiences of being othered strengthened his religious identity. Therefore, he also believes that a “pursuit of God” will help the “misfits and unaccepted” to gain a sense of belonging when they don’t feel welcomed anywhere else. Interestingly, and importantly, religion is not always a unifier.

Religion can certainly also be strongly divisive. Important to note here are the experiences particularly of refugees, many of whom are sponsored by religious organizations or churches. In her memoir *Stealing Buddha’s Dinner* (2008), Bich Nguyen explores a complex relationship with religion and Christianity. While she admires her grandmother’s religiosity and rituals to Buddha, she is also of a family who was sponsored by a Christian church in Michigan, but simultaneously was also shunned by a white female neighbor (in her childhood) for not being

Christian. This latter experience truly led to division between Bich and her neighbor, in her childhood. While someone like Doug attributes this strong sense of belonging and unity to his religion, it is important to remember individuals like Bich who see religion and Christianity in a negative light.

Jack, a 20-year-old who was born in South Korea but lived in West Lafayette, Indiana, since preschool, studied cross cultural psychology in a Christian undergraduate institution, and also mentioned a passion for helping “third culture kids,” by which he means kids who feel out of place. As a psychology student, he specifically focused his research interest on counseling “third culture kids.” Again, personal experiences informed these professional passions and desires, but for Jack it was as growing up as a self-identified “third culture kid” himself. Also, even more strongly than Daniel, he directly correlates his experiences of racism with the Midwest. Therefore, Jack has a strong desire to one day leave the Midwest. Jack experienced discrimination when he came to Indiana, and he reflects back on his experience on local soccer teams. He remembers that, “a lot of the coaches would always say like, wouldn’t even give an eye on me, wouldn’t even let me play um... because I look Asian. I’m skinny. I, uh, don’t look athletic at all. And I mostly realized that, like I think there was a club team I played, and my coach, the director of the club said, ‘I think this is the first international we’ve ever hired [meaning: asked to join the soccer club team] for a club team.’ And I kind of looked at them and said, ‘That’s so sad.’” This revealing moment showed Jack the lack of diversity and the lack of awareness. However, an even more poignant moment in Jack’s life was during college at a Christian university in Ohio, a religious academic institution. He further shared, in detail, “Even in the university, last year, if I can be blunt with you, I lost my job. I lost all my scholarships actually too. [This University is] a very heavily white-populated school. And then, my suspicion

actually is that they don't understand what diversity actually is. I was the first international chaplain at [this institution], out of the 160 years of their school history.”

This vocabulary of Jack and also his coach describing an ‘international’ population, is a product of a color-blind/post-racial society that minimizes or disregards the importance of racial identity (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Jack, self-identifying as an international, and his experiences of consistently being referred to as not American, are a perpetuation of internalized oppression. He has been called an outsider, though he has lived in the United States since preschool, implied in the term “international,” and he himself refers to himself in this way. Furthermore, this history of a lack of national, racial, and ethnic diversity at this religious academic institution stirs many questions about race and the American church. During this time of being fired as chaplain (which was a democratically voted-in position by the student population), Jack heard rumors of the reasons why he was let go, with people asking, “Why would you want an international chaplain when he wouldn’t understand what American culture is?” or “What is he going to do?” He heard these rumors through different departments and offices on campus, his peers and friends, as well as on social media.

When asked about his emotional response to this experience, Jack shared that he was not surprised, but disappointed, especially for a “Christian school.” Furthermore, he shared, “I was kinda used to that pain, so it wasn’t anything new.” To become numb to such acts of discrimination, prejudice, racism, and othering in a place he calls home, in a place he expected ultimate acceptance, is an unfortunate travesty and no one should be left without the resources to respond to. Due to his economic situation, Jack had three different jobs in addition to this chaplain position from which he was let go. The reason he was given for being fired was that he was not “adequate enough” with no further explanation. After sharing about this racism he was

subjected to, Jack looked beyond campus for work, and he was hired as a youth minister in the English Ministry of a Korean church where he shares he “fe[lt] more at home. Like I feel... the kids are more, kids are going through what I went through, so the job feels a lot better.” These experiences at a predominantly white institution juxtapose sharply with Jack finding community, understanding, and belonging from other Korean Americans who do get him and who do not fear whether he will promote ‘American culture’ or not.

While Jack has a strong desire to leave the Midwest because of his painful experiences as a Korean American, he also discusses viewing his Korean American identity as a “blessing” from God, which compels him to use it and take advantage of it. Jack shares his philosophy on diversity, “I believe in diversity, I believe in like unifications. And in order to do that, if God has blessed us as a Korean American, we need to take in part of the Korean side and also the American side. And that just goes a long way, for God’s glory. If God has blessed us in this way, I think we should really take advantage of his blessing. Really take to the full—um, fullness of the blessings he’s given us.” So, despite viewing his identity as a blessing, he still desires to leave the Midwest because for him, being a minority in Ohio and in Indiana meant experiencing racism and not experiencing belonging or fulfillment in his identity. Jack’s experiences counter the narrative of a time when “America was great.” The Midwest is not a part of his life that evokes warm memories, longing, or nostalgia. Instead, these spaces are fraught with discrimination and racism. Seeing the Midwest through Jack’s eyes highlight the role of space and place through the person who experiences it, and gives us a more accurate view that allows us to challenge whether America was as “great” as some want us to believe.

The Midwest as a Space for Learning How to Handle Difference

Other respondents had a very different attitude towards the Midwest. Daniel and Susan, though both currently on the West Coast in California, are grateful for what they had to learn from their negative experiences in the Midwest. Daniel shared that he does not want his children, that he hopes to have in the future, to grow up on the West Coast because he views the West Coast as homogeneous. However, he views the Midwest as a space where he had to confront those differences in ways that people on the West Coast do not need to confront them. Daniel explains, “I think there’s so much to the world than one thing. Um and I think that’s why I appreciated my upbringing in the Midwest. I didn’t know what I was going through, but there was something that was shaping me that I probably wouldn’t have experienced if I was just around a bunch of Asian people.”

Similarly, Susan sees growing up in a place like Los Angeles, as a Korean American, as being surrounded by more ethnically Korean individuals where you do not need to “deal with” difference, therefore it is more beneficial to grow up in the Midwest. She stated, “Because if you grow up in LA, you’re surrounded by more Koreans. For some people, you have less opportunity to interact with like white people. But here, we are the minority. You deal with like white Americans or other people. I think it’s beneficial for us growing up in the Midwest.” Susan, who grew up in Youngstown but who now resides in Orange County, California, experienced intense and traumatic discrimination in her youth. And like the other respondents mentioned above, these traumas led Susan to desire to become an educator because of her experience of being discriminated in school growing up. Her goal is to change the system that did not support her as a child. Though Susan is not looking to be an influence in the church space specifically, Susan

has certainly been shaped by her religious identity. Susan explains how a Korean immigrant church was essential for her healing:

And then, because my Korean church in high school which was the church my mom worked in and still works in [in Virginia], is really interesting different demographics than most Korean churches. So, my Korean church is made up of at that time entirely of women. And the pastor is a woman and because that is a military area so all the Koreans are Korean women married to American men. And so, the Korean churches in that area, all the women that are married to American men, they got frustrated because they were treated like second class citizens in the Korean churches, so they formed their own new church of all Korean women married to American men. It was, so when we moved there, we moved there to help form that church. And we were like the only full Korean kids in the whole church. Everyone else was, it was all women, and they like adopted us. They took care of us and they were like so nurturing and I played piano for them. It was like a small church, maybe 20 people in the beginning. Now there's 250 in that church and there's men! Haha. I was like whoa, there's men here! Haha. It's still female pastor. But and the American dads, they are part of the church too now and they have like some services in English for American dads. But I think that church was such a nurturing loving open environment. Those women gave like their whole, they cared for us a lot. We were really poor and to pay for my AP exams, my mom had to go, we couldn't pay groceries for that week to pay that \$200 whatever the cost for those 3 exams. The church gave us, they would give us food when we would not have enough food. And those women, they don't make a lot of money. They like gave me money for college. I think that was the healing, the big first real, cause my Korean church in Ohio, there was like mostly like doctors or, and they were really cold and distant, the adults. And then the kids, there wasn't that many. It was such a small, yeah. It was like a typical Korean church... there's no real like, other than that there's a bunch of dads and stuff, but then this church we went in, it was different. Really different. The women were so open, and I think having all women too and like my family was all women. We lost a dad, so I think that was really what was the start. And then college was just solidifying and then yeah... Oh my God. It's an amazing place. Cause they were charismatic too. We started out full gospel Assembly of God and there were a lot of women like former prostitutes and like there's women with like suicide marks on their arms and stuff. And those first couple years, there was so much crying and screaming and healing. Now we're Presbyterian. A lot more calmer. Haha.

Yes, Susan's mind healed from an understanding from an intellectual perspective of how to process racism in society as manifested in her personal life, but an emotional healing began before all of that, in this nurturing church. Born out of ostracism through race and gender, these Korean women who experienced othering as Korean military brides knew how to deal with pain and hurt. This is reminiscent of even the function of the earliest churches in Korean American

history. The manner in which this community came together is incredibly powerful and impactful, it is a community that began to make Susan whole again.

Seeing Ethnic Identity Through Religious Eyes

Several other respondents spoke of their ethnic and racial identity through a religious lens, and explain how God has helped them accept their ethnic and racial identities. Cassie, a 22-year-old second-generation Korean American who grew up in Columbus, Ohio, describes her awareness of herself and the process of identification. On this journey she remembers, “so much insecurity um, and it just being so sensitive to things other people said, like my brother was mean to me, and then everyone was mean to me, and I was just like crazy. Um and I think a lot of this insecurity came from the Asian community more so than my high school community because I like don’t remember seeing a lot of backlash from them.” From this time of her life, and on this journey of finding her identity, she recognized her own insecurities and where they came from. She associates these insecurities specifically with the Asian identified community around her, rather than her predominantly white school community. She continues explaining how a change in context shifted her view of herself:

But this was also the first time that I recognized that like I was not white. Um it’s because...I had grown up like with the same class of students for like eleven years up to this point so I had never seen myself as an outsider and when I went into high school all of a sudden I’m being told, I went to Italy with my soccer team, and my mom kept saying ‘you’re the only Asian people here out of all the soccer players across the world’ and that was probably like the first time I was like wow, I am Asian. And like Asian girls don’t play soccer. And then when I was a sophomore all of a sudden, these upperclassmen would come to me and would be like ‘Asia, Asia’ and like initially it wasn’t malicious, and I was young, so I laughed it off but as I grew older I realized that like this is really aggressive. Like it carries a lot of really oppressive outsider stereotypes and that’s absolutely not okay.

For Cassie, to be an insider, was to be white, which is a clear connection between belonging (or a sense of it) and racial identity, specifically. When her eyes were opened to viewing herself in a

different way, as not white, her eyes were also opened to the methods and modes of othering that were imposed upon her. Through her process of politicization and education during her time at a private liberal arts college in Southern California, is she now able to look back and identify these moments as ‘aggressive’ and ‘oppressive.’ These new experiences of othering and self-realization as a non-white person, pushed her towards her Korean community. Cassie shares, “being a part of the church strongly shaped my identity because it made me feel better. And I had a lot of unnis [Korean word to describe females who are within your generation but older than you] so I was always seen as the cute, ditzy, loud girl and like that was something I’ve really come to embrace so like being very aloof um and I dated a Korean boy and that was like a really big part of my life. Um although I was surrounded by white community my best friends, like my very, very closest friends that I spent every weekend with they were always Korean.” Her Korean community was her church community, tying her religious, ethnic and racial identities together. This ‘feeling’ of acceptance and belonging drew her closer to the Korean church community.

During her college years, there was further growth and change in terms of her identity. She discusses how the space of the Midwest affected how she is perceived to be, and in turn influencing how she saw herself:

Because before, being Asian in Ohio meant being Korean American, “Oh my God, we’re such FOBs [“fresh off the boat”] because we’re just a bunch of Koreans together.” But being Asian in California meant we’re in a very PC, safe environment with people who are accustomed to going to school with a lot of Asian Americans. They’re used to diversity. So, when I meet Asian Americans, I’m not like, “Oh my God, we have so much to relate to,” and like, “Hi, you’re American, I’m American. We both happen to have yellow skin but we’re just two people who are friends.” So that helped me accept my Asian identity, Asian American identity a lot more, and it made me...I want to say color-blind, in the way that I wasn’t hyper aware sensitive or embarrassed of being around Asians. But I was like, I can’t believe I ever felt that way.

Being such a minority in Ohio heightened her racial and ethnic identity (she racially identifies as Korean American, and ethnically identifies as Korean). Being in southern California during her undergraduate years gave her an experience of being around so many more Asian Americans which gave her a sense belonging, but it also minimized the emphasis on her racial and ethnic identity. Interestingly, it was national identity as an American that was heightened as the unifying aspect amongst her community. It's also here that she expresses internalized oppression in not wanting to be around others who looked like her. Another important element of this process of accepting herself and her identity was her religion, and a sense that with God, there was purpose and intentionality in her identity as an Asian person:

It was my senior year. I had five little sisters. So, I came back from Edinburgh, and Ivy wasn't part of them, so I was like, "Okay! Hi!" so I befriended these girls. One was Taiwanese, one was Japanese, one is Chinese, one is Korean. There are four of them. Okay. And so well, I felt like I was at home, and this was the first time I remember thinking--My head was on this girl's shoulder and I was just playing with her hair. And I remember thinking, "Wow God, thank you so much for making me Asian." And that was the first time I thanked God for making me Asian. In seventh grade, God revealed to me that I was ashamed--no I was in tenth grade, God had revealed to me that I was ashamed of my Koreanness, which absolutely stunned me but there was a lot of truth in that. So yeah, now I'm in South Korea and this experience is really really important to me because I want to explore what it means to be Korean. I can feel...so real. And as I sit and fellowship with the people here, I am--my heart, my compassion is growing for Korean people, but compassion I think is unstoppable. So, it doesn't just grow for Korean people. As I read about 9/11, as I read about events in the US, my heart breaks for events it never would've broken for before... And as I studied to do this program, North Korea became a lot more real to me, whereas I read occasionally, I don't really care. It's like so far removed from my life, like these people don't really have faces to me... But working with these defectors all of a sudden got making my heartbreak for North Korea. So, I'm really...I'm really excited.

Furthermore, again, her space and context, now being in South Korea after this process of politicization has shaped her view of those who share her ethnic identity. There is greater acceptance, greater belonging, greater compassion instead of shame and internalized oppression.

“I think about being Korean as a very negative thing” and Internalized Racial Oppression

Unlike these individuals who, despite experiences of racism, came to see their identities as blessings, of course there were others who did not see their identities in this positive light. Adele, a second-generation Korean American female who grew up in Ohio, the fourth of five children, grew up in a “tough” home. Adele describes the environment as “really intense,” because “my mom made us practice four hours of piano a day since we were four years old and we have five pianos in the house so that we could all practice at the same time.” Adele’s closest community during her college years was her Asian American Christian fellowship called Koinonia. However, when asked about whether Korean culture would be something she would want to share with future generations, she answered,

I guess I tend to think about I think about being Korean as a very negative thing. I used to fall into this category of like Korean pride or whatever. But I see so much like the brokenness in it. And the culture that does cultivate pride and like a firmness in heart that can’t be changed. And like respect is a good thing but I think it can also be a fuse and I have seen that. So, there are things about Korean culture that I can’t see the value in only because I’ve just seen it to the extreme. Yeah. It’s not really been used well a lot of the times. So yeah, I certainly like definitely don’t want to pass that on to my child if that ever happens. But. But I think Koreans are very hospitable. And communication is important no matter what so being able to speak the language would be a good thing.

Her experiences in her home and growing up in a Korean American church, have influenced this view of Korean identity and Korean culture in general. Furthermore, her time outside of Ohio, now in Memphis, Tennessee, has opened her eyes and challenged her to think very differently about identity. When asked to further expand on what other elements besides language and respect she would want to teach to future generations, she responded,

Yeah. Not so absolute. And I think it just comes from having seen like, not through Med school but more during my time in Memphis. I guess like when I came to Memphis, I really wanted to see what it meant to love and fear the Lord outside of this Asian American context that I had always been in. And like what does it mean for a black Memphian to love and serve the Lord? What does it mean for a Caucasian fellow resident who didn’t grow up having to practice 4 hours of piano a day? You know? Like or being

forced to study. Like what does that look like? I think that there is I found that there's like much healthier routes to do it. So sorry that doesn't really answer your question.

Interestingly, at this point, Adele wanted to further emphasize that it's not solely negative and painful experiences that drives her view of Koreans, this also influences her curiosity to better understand how those of a different background than herself lived their lives. There is a confluence of religious identity and racial identity here, as well as a disappointment or frustration in how her religious and ethnic identity may have been forced upon her in her youth. The route she was exposed to was "unhealthy." Growing up, the confluence of identities here affects how she practiced her religious identity, how certain practices were enforced, and the culture of her everyday life. This distinction between life as a dependent child versus an independent adult speaks to the generational differences and challenges between the first and second-generation as well. There is a negative association with the "Asian American context that I had always been in."

Another manifestation of this negative view of Korean American identity, that has been mentioned in many narratives above, is that of internalized racial oppression. There is a spectrum of expressions of internalized racial oppression, as well as a spectrum of responses to these experiences of internalized oppression. Religion and religious identities can be, but are not necessarily, an important facet to handling and better understanding their racial identities. Abby, a 21-year-old, second-generation Korean American who grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, is a respondent who struggled with her acceptance of other Asians and Asian Americans.

Um so my best friend here is Korean as well. So, that's one of them. That IS a major thing, I think. Just cuz, haha, I don't like saying this, I don't really like being with other Asians, as much as it sounds weird. I feel it's harsh to say, but I just don't because they just annoy me. I feel like it's sort of like...embarrassed? They're like embarrassing to be around them. Cuz a lot of them... I don't know...like especially their clothing. Like what they're wearing is just like, what are you wearing? Or like they ACT very differently. So, I'm just like... it's just out of the norm. So, I'm like...ok, don't do that! Haha! Don't do

that!... Just like. It's so weird. For instance, like if you're out in a very public place and like a group of Asians are like doing something weird like dancing to music. They're doing some weird moves. I feel like that's so much easier to point out and be like wow that's REALLY WEIRD. Don't, you know? Whereas, if it was a white group, and they were doing something weird, it's just like, they're just doing something weird. They're just being immature, like, you know? But you don't go like, oh wow that group of white people, they're just being SO weird. I guess it's also because it's America, it's predominantly white, so it's just easier to point out the Asians or any other race.

Abby, though being uncomfortable feeling or thinking this way, is very adamant in her attitude towards other Asians, and to a lesser extent, other Asian Americans: "It's not that I don't want to. But I wouldn't... It's not as harsh as when I'm thinking towards international, you know? If they're Asian American, it's not so bad. But they also obviously all carry like their Asian background, so...yeah." The interesting contradiction here is that her best friend is Korean, but she is able to be close friends with her, at least in part, because of their shared negative view towards Asians. Furthermore, Abby adds:

"Cuz she's also very like white, I guess. We have similar, we have that background. We have that same background. She's Korean, I'm Korean. So, we both have the same things. But then that's just it, it's just the background. But everything else is very white and American. So, we understand difficulties and struggles especially when it comes to like families. Cuz obviously, families are first generation, so they're SUPER Korean. So, we understand each other and the struggles and whatnots, so yeah."

Abby's language in describing herself and her Korean friend reveals the complexity of their racial and ethnic identities. Their Korean ethnic identities are seen as a backdrop to an otherwise racially white and nationally American identity. Throughout the interview it became clear that Abby equates "American" with whiteness:

Umm. I don't even know. Haha. That's a good question! I guess being the dominant. Maybe not being looked down. Just like feeling very comfortable...I guess just the way I act, basically. Like there are different ways that people think. Obviously if you're Korean you're not going to think the same way as a white person, an American. Like different values and stuff like that. I have Korean values, but since I WAS raised in America, like, I can see both ways, but I'm mainly going to go towards the American, like, ways.

[Q: Do you think you can explain what some of those “ways” are? What are some of those ways of thinking?] I guess, if for example, umm... oh gosh, I dunno. It’s kinda hard. I can’t really pinpoint. I remember talking to my brothers every time there’s like a situation or something, they’re always like “I think this is how it should be done,” I’d be like, “No, why? It should be like this” and they’re like, “you’re so American.” I can’t think of what it is though.

[Q: If being American means being white, where do you fit into America?] I guess when I say America is white, I don’t really mean by skin color. I just mean like acts and view and morals and all that kind of stuff.

Though Abby restates that whiteness is not a “skin color,” but instead a belief system, she does use both terminologies, “white” and “American.” White people think differently, feel differently, and are afforded the privilege of “feeling very comfortable,” and “not being looked down” upon. It is clear that there is value judgment placed upon these racial and nationalistic identities, hierarchizing white and American identity over Korean identity. There is also an assumption made that white people and Korean people will not think similarly, so she views an unbridgeable gap between these two ways of thinking and living.

Another illuminating element of this claiming of whiteness is the perception of experiences of racism, discrimination, or prejudice. When asked whether she has ever experienced any of these, she responded matter of factly,

“Mmm. I mean there’s obviously jokes made all the time. At times I’d be like, it’s funny. Cuz like it’s a joke. But at the same time, it depends on the joke or WHO makes it. Like I’d be like I don’t know you well enough for you to make a joke like that. Sometimes there’d be like a joke on appearance cuz obviously Asians have squintier eyes, so they’d be like, oh can you see me? So, you know what I mean, like those kinds of jokes. Umm. I don’t think I’ve experienced much racism.”

She accepts it when her friends, or people who are “naturally funny... Then you know the things they say, they’re not so like...It’s like it’s because they’re funny. That’s how they are.” When asked how she feels when she is asked, “No, where are you *really* from?” She explained, “It doesn’t make me feel anything because obviously I look different so they’re...and I think it’s cuz

I'm like that too. Like I'll see someone, and I could tell by their appearance that they're not American then I'll go, where are you really from? Like I'll say it too. It's like a thing to... a conversation starter?" With the same response when asked if she has been called "whitewashed, a banana, or a twinkie (yellow on the outside, white on the inside)," she responded, "It doesn't make me feel anything cuz I totally agree with it and I'll even call myself a twinkie sometimes. And some people won't know what I'm talking about and I'll say, you don't know what a twinkie is?! So, I'll explain it to them. So, I'm not offended by it cuz I agree." These uncritical views towards these microaggressions (which is not how she views them) is more of an acceptance, and further a perpetuation of these derogatory terms and microaggressions.

Alongside these views of Asians and Asian Americans, whiteness and American identity, she sees a direct correlation between being Korean and being Christian. Abby stated, "I think Korea in general, I think they're all Christians. There aren't any Catholics or, I dunno, they're all Christians. So, I think because of the fact that my family is Korean, that's why they have chosen Christianity and so because of that, I'm a Christian." Rather than seeing her religious identity as a personal decision, it was an outflow of her parents having identified as Christians which qualifies her as a Christian. While her Korean identity is not very strong and does not identify who she is, as she explained, religious identity "totally affects the way I am, the way I think, and the decisions I make." Currently though, she does not attend church, and she only visits church (a Korean church) when she visits her family, where she does not have community. She also shares that she does not struggle with participating in or having been a part of a Korean ethnic church community growing up. For Abby, her ethnic and religious identities are strictly tied together, Korean equates with Christianity for her. When asked to rank her various identities in order of importance, she states that she cares for and identifies most strongly with her family,

and then next with her religious identity as a Christian. The complexities and contradictions with which Abby identifies and expresses and practices her identities reveal an interesting intersectionality, making the point that there is not a clear trajectory of progression of identities. It also reveals the complexities of how one practices and how one explains multiple identities. The difficulty Abby had in sharing some of her views and identities shows the difficulty, and the coexistence of expression and practice of identity. One's expression of identity does not negate their practice of identity, even with the contradictions.

Conclusion

These Korean American individuals who grew up in the Midwest and who identify as Christians shared their experiences of the ways they have not felt welcomed, included, or as if they belong in spaces across the Midwest. When asked about whether they have ever been asked, “where are you *really* from?” or if they had been described as a banana, twinkie, whitewashed, a FOB (“fresh off the boat”), nearly all of them had experience with these encounters in one way or another. These narratives point to the harsh reality that racism is a battle that continues on, persisting in real ways with real consequences. Racism has not been diminished in any way, even if it may manifest in ways today that are different from decades and centuries past (Alexander 2012, Bonilla-Silva 2009, Sue and Sue 2007). While the experiences of othering are familiar to nearly all respondents, not all of them identified them as ‘othering’ or ‘racism.’ In fact, many of the respondents accepted these experiences and had an attitude of not seeing them as problematic. This is where the response to these othering experiences began differing. There is a broad spectrum of interpretations and responses to experiencing racial and ethnic prejudice, discrimination and racism. On one end, Abby shared how her view of herself as white co-exists

alongside her rejection and othering of other Asians and Asian Americans. Her internalized oppression manifests in a rejection of those who share her racial identity.

Susan experienced such traumatic racism that took years of healing which are still vividly remembered in her mind even today. Unfortunately, “one of the reasons that discrimination and its effects could be particularly rampant in rural and new settlement areas is the isolation and lack of social support that newcomers are likely to experience, possibly leading to internalized oppression, depression, and poor identity development” (Kiang and Supple 2016). In response, Susan uses her role as an educator to be an influence in society, so others do not have to go through what she did.

Others, like Cecilia also responded with a desire to change the society they grew up in. The role of religion in these responses also varied significantly and reveals an important aspect of potential change. In regard to responses towards racism and internalized oppression, religious identity is not readily recognized as a factor for affecting change, which other scholars also recognize as an important absence to fill (Evans et al., 2014; Kiang and Supple 2016; Kinefuchi, 2010; King, Elder, & Whitbeck, 1997; Putnam, 2000; Trieu, 2018). However, several responses showed how it was specifically through their religious identity that individuals have been able to accept their identity, embrace it and even celebrate it. Secondly, it is through their religious identities and roles in their churches that they see how the church can become a space of healing for those who have experienced racism like themselves. They aim to be agents of change in religious spaces, deliberately addressing issues and struggles of identity and racism, rather than waiting solely for organic manifestations of change through friendships and a sense of belonging. These respondents show great potential for expanding research on internalized oppression, racism, and the role of religious identities as intersecting with racial and ethnic identities.

Respondents like Susan and Cecilia also highlight the critical importance of education in helping individuals and groups understand how and why racism exists in order for them to accept their own identities and respond positively. While these respondents' narratives clearly show the presence of persistent racism in the Midwest, however, their experiences also reveal the healing that can emerge from the heartland.

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CHAPTER 3: CREATING AND CLINGING TO ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: ACCESSIBILITY TO BELONGING IN CHRISTIAN KOREAN AMERICA

Having a community where one belongs provides structure and meaningful relationships for Korean Americans in places dominated by other racial groups. For many respondents, having this kind of meaningful community with other co-ethnics has allowed for restoration and reconciliation in terms of understanding and accepting their own ethnic and racial identities. Being in the Midwest where these respondents may not necessarily have local access to a co-ethnic population, finding belonging and community becomes even more essential. What is community? Dhingra (2009) borrows Putnam's (2000) definition of community, which is that community comes from "a combination of a shared moral order and sustained social capital within communal gathering spaces or events" (p. 322). A shared moral order means having shared interests and values with other members. Having a shared ethnic identity can be an example of a community with a common moral order which also allows for social capital with each other. Having a shared religious identity can provide the same elements of community.

There are two significant ways that the second-generation Korean American Christian respondents in my project have found, whether deliberately or not, this kind of meaningful community and a sense of belonging. First, is during middle and high school through a Christian summer youth camp that I refer to as 'Camp W.' In an organic manner, a significant number of respondents mentioned a certain camp they attended that was specifically aimed at ethnically Korean youth from Korean Protestant Christian churches in Ohio. In this chapter I share how Camp W played a critical, often times empowering, role in the lives of Midwest second-generation Korean Americans. The second factor of influence are the Korean American or Asian American religious student organizations that my respondents chose to participate in during their

college years. From these college experiences, I show how participation in these racial or ethnic specific religious groups largely strengthened both their religious and ethnic identities. For these respondents, college is a critical time of growth, maturation, and affirmation in multiple ways (Kibria 1999, Sidel 1994, Trieu 2009). These pockets of religious Korean American spaces within the Midwest provide solace and comfort to these young Korean Americans and they play an important role in developing their identities as Christians, as Korean Americans, and as Christian Korean Americans.

In this chapter I begin with a review of literature on immigration to new settlement destinations, Asian American identity and everyday life in the Midwest, Asian American experiences in college, and second-generation Korean American Christians in college. I then proceed with sharing the voices of respondents who find ethnic support in church camp. It is here that I also provide an example of a respondent who serves as an important reminder that these spaces are not communal and welcoming for everyone. The following section is about respondents whose college experiences allowed them to embrace their ethnic and racial identities in ways they did not know they could. The last section discusses how participation in these ethno- or racial-religious spaces contributed to strengthening their religious identities during college.

Immigration to New Settlement Destinations

Portes and Zhou (1993) have done important work looking at theories of adaptation and incorporation of post-1965 children of immigrants. Their theory of segmented assimilation proposes three possible routes: straight line assimilation, downward assimilation or selective acculturation. This mid-range theory looks at the interaction between the individuals and structural forces (Zhou 1999). Straight line assimilation is incorporation into mainstream society

and more frequent interaction with majority members. Downward assimilation is related to Gans' (1992) "second-generation decline," and Perlman and Waldinger's (1999) "second-generation revolt" which says race, proximity to majority society, and the absence of mobility ladders can contribute to a rejection of adaptation. Selective acculturation is a process of acquiring certain cultural elements and practices of the dominant culture while maintaining elements of their own ethnic culture. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue that the process of selective acculturation could help facilitate upward assimilation for the second-generation. This theory of incorporation has appeal for scholars in the field because of its flexibility, and the recognition that immigrants are not all assimilating into the same "America," or adapting in the same ways. Gans (1979) coined the term "symbolic ethnicity," which is that ethnic individuals and groups will one day no longer need ethnic cultures or organizations, but instead will be able to rely on symbols of ethnicity, and thus, symbolic ethnicity will replace ethnicity. His theory was specifically about white ethnics, white European immigrants. This exclusive theory brings out the question of who is able to practice this "symbolic ethnicity." Gans (2014) revisited his earlier hypotheses and confirms that for later generation European Americans, ethnicity is disappearing, although vestiges of ethnicity will likely remain. Gans (2014) provides scant attention to racial minorities of recent immigrants, and merely posits they (those from Asia and Latin America) will follow the same path as later generation descendants of European immigrants. He argues that they will integrate into American society and ethnicity will become less salient.

And how is adaptation and assimilation functioning for immigrants to non-traditional settlement states? Gozdziaik and Martin (2005) point out a critical change in recent years in the patterns of settlement of recent immigrants, showing that immigrants are moving or immigrating

to non-traditional states at a much higher rate than they are moving to traditional states. The reason they want to know who these immigrants are and whether they differ from the immigrants moving to traditional states is for the formulation of better-informed integration policies and programs (Gozdziak and Martin 2005). Integration is more complex and not the same as in regions that have more readily recognizable histories of immigration. It is clear from the previous chapter that this applies to the Korean American experience in the Midwest as well, and that they too are experiencing the negative consequences of how others perceive them.

Kiang and Supple (2016), in their discussion on the development of Asian American youth and families in rural and new immigrant destinations in predominantly white spaces, argue that the role of community is critical because of how it can spread widely into interactions with “family, peers, schools, and other community structures” (p. 78). Furthermore, the social aspect of the reception from the receiving community in these new immigrant destinations can and does affect daily life and the way families adapt and even identify or define themselves (Kiang and Supple 2016). Every respondent of my project grew up in spaces where they were not around a significant number of ethnically Korean or racially Asian individuals or groups. The typical pattern of these respondents’ daily lives is a weekday environment that is very distinct from their weekend spaces. While during the week their friendships were with non-Asian individuals, on the weekends, their friendships were in church and were with other second-generation Korean Americans. Perhaps even more significantly than this distinction between their weekday lives from their weekend lives, is that their weekend friendships were far deeper, more intimate and meaningful, and contributed to a stronger sense of their own ethnic identities.

Asian American Identity and Everyday Life in the Midwest

From Trieu's (2018) discussion of the ethnic and racial identity formation of second-generation Asian Americans who grew up in smaller communities of co-ethnics, there are two distinct patterns that became apparent in her respondents. First, are those she names, *isolated ethnics*, those who are geographically distant from a co-ethnic community and whose interaction with co-ethnics was limited to weekly or occasional experiences. As a result of this distance from a co-ethnic population, *isolated ethnics* shared "pervasive feelings of loneliness and isolation" (Trieu 2018: p. 191). This sentiment is shared by Nguyen (2015) from the book *Asian Americans in Michigan: Voices from the Midwest*, where she concludes, "If there's one element that marks the varied and complicated experience of Asian Americans in Michigan, it may be the understanding of *isolation*" (p. 332; emphasis added). Trieu (2018) furthers that limited *access points* that these Asian Americans had were critical to the prominence of ethnic identity, providing a sense of belonging. Additionally, growing up in predominantly white spaces greatly influences self-perceptions of Asian Americans, with some even expressing that they identified as being 'white.'

Second are *everyday ethnics*, those who live geographically closer to a co-ethnic community. In contrast with *isolated ethnics*, these Asian Americans had continuous and close proximity to *access points*. As a result, it was evident from Trieu's respondents that these *everyday ethnics* had a strong sense of ethnic pride and support from co-ethnics. For my respondents, along this same pattern of the depth of weekend friendships at church that these *isolated ethnics* had, is the significance of church camps and retreats in these respondent's lives, which equates with being gatherings of co-ethnics, fellow second-generation Korean Americans who also grew up in the Midwest in predominantly white spaces and institutions. Another

important pattern from my respondents is the role of the college or university space in developing a deeper sense of a Korean American and Asian American identity, that contributes to a transition from being an isolated ethnic to an everyday ethnic. Trieu's (2018) research critically emphasizes the importance of addressing geographic context and ecology to ethnic and racial identity formation. Looking at the Midwestern Asian American experience necessitates addressing how proximity to a co-ethnic community influences self-perceptions and identity.

Dhingra (2009, 2012) has also done important research on expanding our view of Asian American life in the Midwest. Dhingra (2009, 2012) specifically explores how ethnic minorities build community when they are around relatively fewer co-ethnics through the experiences of Indian American motel owners in Ohio. He specifically is interested in how these Indian American motel owners form an ethnic community when their co-ethnics are their business competition. Dhingra finds that the respondents relied on two different means of creating ethnic ties, one was to look beyond the local vicinity for community and beyond their occupational boundaries, and secondly to come together with their business competition through occupational and social meetings (national ethnic organizations, volleyball games). Dhingra's research shows that camaraderie and competition coexist for this Indian American population in the Midwest. They respond creatively and strategically to the lack of a large co-ethnic population and the fact that co-ethnics are economic rivals, and they create social capital but without strict bonds.

Similarly centered on region, Wang (2014) conducted a three-year ethnography of a growing Muslim immigrant congregation in a mid-sized city in the Midwest, post 9/11. Wang aims to explore the processes of this group of Muslim immigrants and how they negotiate their multiple identities while aiming to become a part of U.S. society. Wang's respondents encounter an American ideal that appears as if it should be compatible with Islamic values, however, in

reality, they experience an extremely alienating America. Wang finds that for these Muslims to “become American,” they attempt a balance between keeping Islamic tradition and adapting to mainstream American culture. Within their religious spaces, they aim to attract diverse memberships into their congregation to better integrate into a diverse American society. Wang encourages assimilation and states, “It is inevitable that immigrants—if intending to stay permanently—would have to find a way to adapt to American society and fit into the established American social, political, and religious structures” (Wang 2014: 131). This viewpoint seems to encourage a pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps type model of the so-called American Dream. Furthermore, it does not address structural barriers, or reflect the experiences of immigrants and their children who are influencers and agents of change in U.S. society. Immigrants do fit into existing American structures, but they also change them. In research below, scholars have also specifically seen how second-generation Korean Americans create their own spaces in American society in ways that do not compromise their identities and cultures.

Asian American Experiences in College

Kibria (1999) explored the nuances of race and identity during college years of second-generation Korean American and Chinese American individuals. Kibria (1999) discusses the experiences of those who attended college predominantly in the 1970s and 1980s, and those who largely, had not been involved in pan-Asian organizations during college. She was interested in how those who identify as Asian American understand the notion “Asian American.” In her findings, Kibria (1999) found several patterns among her respondents. One pattern was of individuals whose primary friendship networks were largely Asian American, of varied East Asian ethnicities. The majority of individuals with this experience do not explain this as an outcome of a conscious decision or choice, but rather, it “just happened.” They found the

“comfort” of Asian American friendships due to their shared racial identity (enduring the same stereotypes and prejudices) and cultural experiences (growing up in families that emphasized education, family, work). A second pattern was of individuals who viewed “Asian American” as relatively insignificant and an identity that is imposed upon them. A third pattern was of individuals who lacked a connection to Asian or ethnically Chinese or Korean communities on their campuses, as a result of an active rejection of these connections. These individuals felt that the notion “Asian American” encroached upon their individuality and they felt forced to belong to these communities regardless of how they felt about them (Kibria 1999).

In her book, *Identity Construction among Chinese-Vietnamese Americans: Being, Becoming, and Belonging*, Trieu (2009) explores the complexities and nuances of Chinese-Vietnamese American identities to bring attention to diversity even within ethnic groups in the United States. In her chapter called “‘Know Thyself’: College, Asian American Studies, Ethnic Organizations, and Identity,” Trieu (2009) explores whether her respondents’ ethnic and racial identity formation are shaped by their time in college, as influenced by the factors of having taken Asian American Studies courses and participating in racial or ethnic organizations. Trieu (2009) looks to ethnic studies and ethnic/racial organizations because participating in both of these “provides the necessary foundation upon which meaningful (and not symbolic) identities can be built” (p. 145). Of her respondents, 68% have taken Asian American studies and/or participated in an ethnic organization, and 65% of these individuals affirmed that their participation in these endeavors did play a critical role in their identity formation (Trieu 2009). They learn about the significance of a pan-ethnic/racial identity through these two avenues and learning about this significance permits them the opportunity to meaningfully choose how they

want to identify. Those who did not take ethnic studies or participate in an ethnic organization viewed race in a color-blind manner. In other words, they view race as a non-factor in their lives.

Second-Generation Korean American Christians in College

Scholars of second-generation Korean Americans and religion have noted that not only are the percentage of Asian Americans that participate in InterVarsity (a nationwide evangelical campus organization) chapters often as high as 80%, among Asian American campus fellowships (Christian campus organizations and gatherings), second-generation Korean American fellowships are the most visible (particularly on the East and West Coasts) (Kim 2004, Kim 2006, Julie Park 2013). Julie Park (2013) has specifically investigated the history of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship as an institution and organization, explored how it became a space attracting majority Asian American chapters, and how changes in affirmative action policy has complicated Asian American religious participation in campus organizations.

Kim (2004) has explored why second-generation Korean American college students choose to participate in congregations made up of only their own ethnic background instead of pan-ethnic, multiracial, or white college campus ministries that are also available. Though Kim (2004) does not name the colleges and universities that she visits, she does indicate that she chose them because of their majority Asian American student population, thus the accessibility to co-ethnic or racial populations is unquestioned. Despite not having language barriers, and theologically agreeing with white mainstream American evangelicals, Kim asks why the second-generation feels the need for a separate ethnic campus ministry. Kim observes that Christianity can be used as a salient identity marker to offset undesirable aspects of racial identities (racialization). Thus, because Korean Americans are racial minorities in American society, they choose to highlight their religious identity because they are in the religious majority in American

society. They simultaneously view cultural distinctions and commonalities as the measurement by which ethnic boundaries are created (ethnicization) (2004). Kim's findings show that these second-generation Korean Americans choose separate ethnic group ministries because they have a desire to interact with those most familiar and similar to them, and a desire for majority status (as Christians) in American society to counter their ethnic and racial marginalization. When Korean Americans do not have as easy an access to co-ethnic religious communities, how might that shape how they view themselves and others? How far are they willing to travel to meet with other co-ethnics in a religious or social context? What different meanings will their ethnic and religious identities have for them in low population share contexts?

Second-generation Korean Americans desire the familiar in other Korean Americans, but they cannot escape racial identity being constantly imposed upon them by the larger society. Interestingly, their role in U.S. race relations also spurs their desire for majority group status privileges. However, "they find that they are continuously marginalized as an ethnic/racial minority and lack relative power. This interactive process then makes it more likely that SGKAs [second-generation Korean Americans] will form and participate in separate ethnic religious organizations of their own," again, with the privilege of access to the population (Kim 2004: p. 31). This is the perspective of the second-generation that Min and Kim (2005) do not include in their work as further explanation for what distinguishes the first- and second-generation and why perhaps the second-generation views their ethnic identity differently from the first-generation. These perspectives provide an important integrated framework for a more thorough understanding of the sociological implications for mono-ethnic religious participation. Furthermore, they also show that religious participation for minorities is not as simple as choosing between race or culture, but an interactive relationship between the two.

Multiple scholars have found that while second-generation Korean Americans are acculturated into U.S. society and are socioeconomically mobile, they would rather practice their religion with other Korean Americans than with white Americans (Kim 2010; Kim and Kim 2012). Kim's (2010) argument is not that these second-generation Korean Americans are choosing their churches because they experience racial marginalization or because of shared cultural experiences as second-generation Korean Americans, but that these second-generation churches are a creative expression to meet the needs of the multiple identities of their congregation members. Furthermore, "these new ethnic churches are catering to this specific niche and [provide] an innovatively reconstructed spiritual space where their desire for spiritual growth and fellowship is met in a context where they feel at home" (p. 53-54). She calls this a "hybrid third space," and shows how this ethnic group is shaping their own lives and not being shaped by others. Kim has also found that college was a critical turning point because, religiously, they were free from their parents' pressure to attend church, they had an opportunity to find their own religious identities apart from their parents.

The scholars above are de-bunking the once predicted "silent exodus" of the second-generation Korean Americans. Furthermore, they are also showing that Korean Americans are an exception to the research that shows strong patterns of individuals walking away from their religion or faith during their college years (Ketcham 2012; McDowell, 2006; Reid, 2004; Wright 2007). Park (2012) continues to do so by looking at the changes in religiosity that happen during college for Korean Americans at elite higher education institutions. He finds that unlike other Asian and non-Asians of the sample (from the National Longitudinal Study of Freshmen), a larger proportion of second-generation Korean Americans remains significantly active in their faith during college. Furthermore, these Korean American college students are participating in

predominantly Asian religious organizations much more than other Asian college students. Significantly for my research, Park has found that this is true regardless of the proportion of Asian students on those particular campuses. Park's research suggests that these Korean Americans of elite institutions are more strongly inclined towards co-ethnic solidarity relative to their peers of any race or ethnicity, and Park argues that this could lead to further ethnic insularity in life even after college (marriage, employment, etc.). More specifically, Korean American juniors who participated in religious organizations were more insular than their Asian American peers, about 67% compared to 58% (Park 2012). In his analysis, Park calculated that the likelihood of "Asian-majority" religious group participation revealed that Korean protestants were 180 times more likely than white students to be involved in these types of religious organizations (other Asian Protestants were 76 times more likely) (Park 2012). Park's research highlights how the integration of faith into ethnic identity can be a reason for Protestant Korean Americans to prefer ethnic homogeneity in their religious spaces.

Finding Ethnic Support Through Church Camp...Once a Year

An important pattern from my study respondents has been the powerful role that church retreats and church summer camps have had on their lives. There was one church camp in particular that was specifically named nine times, each by different respondents. Abby, who was mentioned earlier in chapter three regarding her experiences with internalized racial oppression, had shared that although she does not like being with or around other Asian or Asian American peoples, her closest friend (who also preferred not to be around other Asians or Asian Americans) is also Korean American. Interestingly, they met in high school at a Korean church summer camp: Camp W. Besides having each other, the rest of their friends are, Abby stated, "all white".

After several years as a camp attendee, Candice was eventually asked to serve as the camp director. As Director of Camp W, Candice shared an overview of the camp itself:

When that previous youth pastor was in charge... I think it started out as, the Korean United Methodist churches came together to start this camp. And then when he took over, he kind of blew it open and made it available to, not just Methodist churches, but to all of the Korean churches... [Is this camp for Korean churches only within Ohio?] I don't think it was meant consciously to be only Ohio but that was our reach. Especially toward his later years, he would invite other churches from Chicago and Kentucky to come and participate but it would end up being mostly Ohio students. And then when I took over, I had consciously made it [renamed], so that it was a little more focused. So, it's for Korean American youth throughout Ohio."

Camp W offered an opportunity for many second-generation Korean Americans to come together once a year, anyone connected to any ethnically Korean church in the state of Ohio. Its impact on these lives is tremendous and speaks to the incredible power of community and belonging, especially amongst youth.

When asked to give an overview of her life, Candice shared that she moved from the west side of Columbus to the northeast side of Columbus, and how this was a major transition in her life:

That was significant to my memory because I had to consciously make friends at that point. Whereas before, I just hung out with whoever was in my classroom, but after moving I had to make an effort to reach out to somebody. That was also connected to when I was moving out, at my church, I was moving out from children's ministry to the youth group. That would actually happen 2 years later, but it all kind of falls in the same timeline for me and it was this BIG transition! And when I transitioned from children's ministry to youth ministry, I distinctly remember feeling like oh now I'm a youth now! Haha. As opposed to being a kid. And the next significant thing was the summer camp that our church always did. That camp was called Camp [W]. And that is when I really first experienced what the love of Jesus meant to me personally. And where I really experienced God's love as unconditional. And I had a really specific sense of it doesn't matter if I am perfect or not. So at the camp is where I first experienced that. I don't know how else to describe it, I felt like that was the beginning of my life's journey.

It is evident that Candice felt this move, transition into youth group at church, this camp, and becoming a Christian, as the most significant moments of her life. She continued speaking about

how the following year when she returned to this same camp, she felt that “God was calling me to ministry.” She explained that high school was a low point in her life, but was not completely dominated by negative experiences because, “each summer I went to the same Camp [W] and that was always the highlight of each year. And especially because my church didn’t have a youth pastor. Camp [W] would be a great place to spiritually recharge and learn something new and connect with other kids that looked like me and had similar experiences as me.” This camp played a significant role in Candice’s life to which she attributes major life experiences and high points, and that was for two reasons. First, as evident in the first quote above, the camp played a significant role in developing and encouraging her religious identity and maturity. Second, as evident in the third quote above, it was a space where she connected with those not only religiously similar, but ethnically and racially similar as well, “kids that looked like me and had similar experiences as me.”

Adele also mentioned this camp when presenting an overview of her entire life, which signals its significance in her youth and upbringing as well. Adele explained,

In high school I went to retreat and that was the first time I felt the power of the Holy Spirit in my life allowing me to pray and to feel free to cry out before the Lord in a way I hadn’t before so. And I’m sure a lot of those fears had to do with pressures that I thought were being placed on me so then when I went to college, I think that my experiencing of the Lord grew a lot more because I had a community to do that with.

She further elaborated on what it was about this camp that gave her such a memorable experience,

At least when I was there, it was my first retreat so I’m not sure if, I guess I was ready for it but like had it been the year prior would it be the same type of experience, I’m not sure, there wasn’t like an instigating something or another but I suppose I kind of link it to the fact that you’re in a place where you’re, people are praying in abundance for well, I don’t know, for the retreat in general and being reminded of God’s truth every day and seeking it out in an intentional way? And that wasn’t a part of my natural life, so yeah.

Similarly, Callie, a 23-year-old who was born in northern Ohio, and raised primarily in Columbus, Ohio, spoke of this camp as incredibly powerful in a religious manner:

And then once that summer came around, I went to the same retreat we had been going to every summer, hosted by that same ministry I was referring to earlier. And that was like another huge encounter with God and probably like the first time I encountered supernatural ability to forgive and I remember God telling me to let go of everything I had against my mom and just forgiving her and all these different things so yeah, I was just like very liberating and I think from that point forward, I really promised like ok, I know in my heart that this isn't how you made life to be, so I'm gonna do something about it. And I just knew there had to be more to life than this mundane like emotional roller coaster of up and down and then living everyday like going to school Monday through Friday and going to church like a few times a week.

It was a turning point in these respondents' lives, in terms of their religious identities. This camp had a powerful way of energizing these young students and awakening something within them.

Katie, who grew up in the suburbs of Columbus, Ohio, and was preparing for graduate school to pursue a career in medical illustration, also mentioned the significance of a Korean American church community while growing up. Her closest friends were peers from church, and this was true from elementary to high school. When asked about her upbringing in this Korean ethnic church, she immediately described her camp experience, "And this was another big thing growing up. Every summer there would be a youth camp, a Christian youth camp and it was predominantly Asian people. Actually, mostly Koreans," which was the same camp that Adele and Candice had mentioned. For Katie, she expressed the close-knit community of Korean ethnics in Ohio, "So that was another place where I made friends and it's funny. It's like they have this saying here like, you know, you pretty much know all the Koreans in Ohio if you, it's like a small world here. You pretty can know everyone like all the Korean community here. I think it's pretty accurate." Undoubtedly the connection would be through the Korean church community, specifically. Katie further explained what it was about this camp that changed her and moved her:

It was the first place I encountered God on a level where I was like wow... that's when I realized that God is my God. You grow up in church and you're like, oh yeah, Sunday school, you hear about Jesus and things like that but then camp [W] was an amazing experience because the first year I went, I was in 6th grade, and we had the altar call one night and I just remember breaking down. I was like what is going on! What is this that I am feeling? I remembered being overwhelmed by this feeling of love and just something that I never experienced before. And then you experience that with so many other kids your same age or similar, so it was a youth camp from 6th grade to end of high school. And you would get broken up into your age groups and then it would be broken up by your gender. And so that was really intimate. You experience this with all these other girls your same age and at the end of the night, you go back to the cabin together and you talk about it... It was a great experience because you experience it together... And then you would keep in contact throughout the school year and you come back the next summer and you would see each other again. That was just, I mean it was great because it was almost something comforting. You'd leave all of the stuff from your school year. And then you come to this retreat like for a week and you're consumed 24/7 by worship and then fellowship and then we would do skits and games and stuff like that... I think the first year when you walk into that camp and you're meeting everyone, it was very cool just to be surrounded by so many Asians because it's so different from the environment that I'm usually in, so I think everyone kind of found that really cool then comforting because you're a part of this community. *You're not like sticking out. Someone that doesn't belong there.* And so I think that definitely played a big part in the beginning. And I think that's the draw too of what brings all these Korean kids together cuz like oh, we're going to a place where there's so many other people like us. I mean that's how I felt definitely. Every summer I'm going to a place where there's gonna be 50 other kids just like me. It's definitely something I looked forward to. [emphasis added]

Katie explicitly attributes the impact of Camp W to her life as coming from the religious enlightenment, coupled with the comfort of not “sticking out” racially or “someone that doesn’t belong there”. The fact that she would go somewhere she would not be the minority, was motivation for her to participate. Similarly, Angela stated how this camp provided a powerful ethnic experience as she was sharing an overview of her life,

I got plugged into going to church camps during the summer time and that was again a huge impact on my life. Not only like spiritually but again also seeing like there are so many Korean people within Ohio. I was blown away. I would see hundreds of other Korean kids just like me. So that was a really big impact and keeping those relationships through letters, phone calls, and that kind of thing. So, I guess that's another big impact.

For Angela, she actually went to three different Korean Christian youth camps in the Midwest, and another one in New York. Again, this connection between this religious experience

along with this ethnically empowering experience came together to create a unifying moment for these respondents. This religious affirmation and ethnic comfort cannot be undermined.

Matthew, a 32-year-old who was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, grew up with Daniel who was mentioned earlier. Both respondents referred to the same Korean Christian youth camp in a similar way. Both of them moved to Columbus for college and there, reconnected with fellow Korean American students they recognized from this camp of their youth. Matthew said,

As soon as I got up there, and connected with a couple friends from retreats, and reconnected with [Daniel], and kinda rebuilt everything there.... So, there were people from there that I recognized, and it was great because my senior year in high school, I had already started making friends because [Daniel] was there. So, I kinda came in with sort of a social foundation, which was really great. And as soon as I got there, I started going to a Vineyard church there, and got involved with their small groups and whatnot.

Similarly, Daniel explained, “I had some church friends. People that I know from [Camp W] that went to [college in Columbus] too, so I hung out with them as well.” Each of these narratives echoes how even an *everyday ethnic-like* experience, one week a year, can be powerful enough to impact *isolated ethnics* for the rest of the year. Hearing about these powerful experiences, both religiously and ethnically, make you wonder how their lives would be different had there been access to such ethno-religious spaces institutions all year round.

This critical pattern of how Camp W provided such a comforting and rich community to these second-generation Korean American Christian youth is a strong example of how ethnic belonging can aid individuals in accepting and embracing their ethnic identities. Furthermore, it shows how religious identity too can be strengthened by and in a co-ethnic environment.

Feeling Unwelcomed When Everyone Around You Have Found Belonging

Ellen, a 23-year-old who grew up in Cleveland and currently resides in Chicago, explained the Korean American Midwestern experience as having its own subculture, one she did not feel welcomed into. Ellen did not have the same positive experience as the respondents above. She says and explains:

I think being Korean American in the Midwest.... yeah, I think definitely growing up in Ohio, there was definitely a Korean church community...you didn't even have to know each other well, but I just kinda knew every other Korean around my age, because there'd be like these um...Korean church retreats and youth group retreats... Now that I think about it, it was a very subculture kind of thing... So that really--I was nervous about my Koreanness around them. Maybe that's where it started. My nervousness in college--being nervous around Korean Americans. I just had a really hard time fitting into that Korean--'youth Korean church youth group camp' crowd. I think my sense of rejection in that crowd kinda carried over into college, where I was like, "uhhh am I Korean enough?" because I didn't fit into the Korean like church youth group thing. Am I going to fit in now? Actually a lot of people I saw in college were from the Korean youth group retreats from when I was younger, so I was like super self-conscious. Yeah so. That aspect, yeah. That definitely helped me become more conscious of myself but also um...at times, it made me really proud to be Korean because I would be the only Korean. So then I'd be like, "Korean!" I would appreciate my culture a lot just because it wasn't always around me if that kinda makes sense. I feel like sometimes when something's always around myself, I see flaws in it a lot, but if it's rare, I'm like, "Oh my gosh! It's awesome."

[Q: Yeah. In what ways did you experience rejection? In what ways did you feel rejected, or were made to feel rejected?]

I feel like definitely if I didn't know enough about my Korean culture--the language was a huge part. Cause I would kinda stutter and not know the right vocab words in Korean. And then also, not really knowing what to connect on since I didn't know a lot of Korean pop culture or holidays or stuff like that. I like couldn't connect on that.

[Q: How often did you go?]

I went twice. But the first time I had a very good experience. The second time...not so good experience. I think cause my first was like... So, it was the summer before sixth grade, so I wasn't very self-conscious of myself. And then the second year, I was going into seventh grade, so a year of being super angsty. I got in and I feel even more displaced because I was like, "I'm not fitting in with these Korean Americans!" So yeah, it was an interesting experience. Made me very self-conscious of my Koreanness.

Ellen was a few years younger than the prior respondents, so it is uncertain whether they would have crossed paths, but it is important to note the nuances of these ethno-religious organization experiences. It was not always an affirming and positive experience, like Kibria (1999) found in some of her respondents who did not want these ethnic organizations to be imposed upon them. For Ellen, she did not speak very much about the religious aspect of these camps, possibly because the ethnic ramifications of these camps for her were much stronger and louder within her. Unfortunately, Ellen was made to feel “othered” and dislocated among other co-ethnics, second-generation Korean Americans.

Later in her interview, Ellen also expressed some feelings of internalized oppression in terms of beauty standards and comparing her Asian features to European features while she studied abroad in Milan, Italy. But in the midst of her experience in Milan, she also found a powerful religious community she grew in and was accepted into. Also, importantly, during college, it was another friend who could relate to this level of otherness that was great encouragement to her. When asked how she would describe her current friendships and community, she recalled:

I think it helped in terms of being able to relate to the Asian American experience. Although my Taiwanese friend isn't Korean...like us having some of the most formative years that were like in college together. We were really able to--a lot of like, experiences of 'Ohh I don't fit in with my Korean group,' and she was like, 'I don't fit in with my Taiwanese group.' Just being able to go through similar struggles of minorities that don't fit into the majority culture, but also don't fit into their native culture either. We fit into a subculture.

Ellen's statement suggests that she found her own subculture. For Ellen, it was meaningful to find another person who was also Asian American but who also understood what it was like not feeling a sense of belonging where she expected to experience belonging.

Furthermore, her earlier experiences of feeling rejected by her own ethnic community did not deter her from seeking belonging with co-ethnics later in life. Nor did her earlier experiences push her away from her faith and religion. In the year Ellen was interviewed, she had just moved to Chicago for work, and there, through personal connections, she was connected with a second-generation Asian American church. Of her immediate experience there, she said, “I felt very comfortable. I think largely it had to do with because there were so many like second-generation Asian Americans around the same income level as me. Like a demographic that I’m very familiar with. And they shared a lot of interests as me, and a lot of the same experiences.” This is a stark contrast to her time at Camp W. Her religious identity has also not been shaken by her negative experience at Camp W. At her current church she joined the church’s social committee (event planning), the welcome team (introducing and welcoming newcomers to the church), and practices her religion with intentionality: “Yeah, I started reading the Bible more, started praying more. It was definitely just like...spiritual disciplines. It’s kind of like a--you don’t want to practice a musical instrument, but after hours of practice, you get better and you enjoy it more. It was kind of the same for me at first. I was like, ‘Oh my gosh, I don’t want to pray or spend time reading.’ But it’s kind of like, I just chugged through it. The end result after each time I did it, I just felt more joyful. I felt better. It really sustained my faith and made it grow.” It was actually her deepening religious identity that kept her seeking church later in life, even after being rejected by a religious community, eventually leading her to an Asian American religious community that she feels comfortable in and actively participates in.

College: Finding Belonging, Both Ethnically and Religiously

College is a very formative age for many, and a college or university setting in particular can provide new and interesting experiences as well (Sidel 1994). For Asian American college

students, college years are also where many begin to embrace and better understand their ethnic and racial identities (Kibria 1999, Kibria 2002, Trieu 2009). For the following respondents, college was formative in terms of developing a sense of ethnic identity through an ethno-religious community, like the Korean Christian youth camps, as well as formative in strengthening religious identity. Cecilia, who attended Korean Christian youth camps and eventually directed the camp, also shared how her years at a college in Ohio shaped who she would become:

So at [University], it was kind of the first time living independently from my parents. [University] is when I really, kind of unconsciously, chose to hang out with specifically Asian Americans and more Korean Americans. I don't think I would've realized it at that time, like I wouldn't have been able to express it as I can now. But I think I definitely, growing up it was a much more predominantly white neighborhood and had a lot more white friends. But in college I could specifically, like I could choose to hang out with Asian Americans, so that's what I ended up doing. And so most of my memories are with my Korean American friends that I made. And especially as I was working with a Christian fellowship called K. And K originally had started 3 or 4 years before I had got there. It started out as a bible study at a Chinese church within the neighborhood and then they moved onto campus. And we're reaching out to specifically college students.

Only after her education in seminary and claiming her identity as a Korean American during her years in seminary, can she look back upon her years as an undergraduate student and recognize that there must have been reasons why she unknowingly, at the time, found herself with mostly Korean American friends. First, Cecilia recognizes that during college, she had the opportunity to spend more time with Korean Americans than she ever had before, growing up in neighborhoods and education systems that were predominantly white. Second, because of this opportunity, she had a choice to make of who she would spend her time with. Thirdly, which she does not mention here, another priority she had was her religious identity, so her primary community during college, which she deliberately chose, was an Asian American Christian fellowship group. At her undergraduate institution:

I had officially joined that fellowship my sophomore year and so during my junior and senior year, I held a leadership position in that fellowship. I was leading bible studies and also training small group leaders to lead bible studies. So, a lot of my time at [college] was doing studies and working with that fellowship and especially my junior and senior year, I just really loved working with the younger class and helping them develop their own skills, realize their own potential. And then outside of school, I was working at a Korean United Methodist church. And I was working there as a youth teacher and working with the youth there. I just remember really falling in love with the kids there and really realizing how much I really wanted to see youth kids fall in love with Christ, really devote their life to becoming disciples of Christ. Those two areas were very significant as far as nonacademically.

This fellowship not only led her to a community of fellow Asian American Christians, but also gave her leadership experiences that would contribute to the career path that she would eventually choose, which is within a church setting. Interestingly, it was friendships from her Korean Christian youth camps in Ohio that she reconnected with at her undergraduate institution that eventually led her into this organization, “K.” The bonds formed at Camp W were incredibly strong, for youth who met up only once a year during the summer. There were elements of familiarity with old friends and emotional affection that were also factors leading her to this community, “If I look back on it now, I think I would say now that definitely K was more comfortable because it was primarily Asian American. Probably was a more significant factor than I would have recognized back then.”

Another consequence of being exposed to this kind of Korean American community at a scale unlike any prior time in her life was exposure to Korean culture and the motivation to begin to question and explore her ethnic and racial identities. Cecilia explained:

And college was also when I made a conscious effort to really try to speak more Korean. So, trying to pick up on it, trying to listen to particularly Korean sermons, so now I can listen to a sermon in Korean pretty well, most of it, which I know is really difficult to some people because of the Christian terms that are in Korean.
[Why do you think it was in college that you started to get more interested in knowing more of the nuances and details of Korean culture and participating in the language?]
I think definitely because I started hanging out with Korean American friends in college. There were more there. And it was, I wonder if college just being that academic

atmosphere where you learn more who you are and how you've come to this point, as in being Korean American, especially in that Asian American Christian kind of atmosphere... are we being exclusively Asian or are we open to all? Why does the existence of an Asian Christian community matter? Sort of kind of having been faced with those problems I definitely didn't dig too deep into that at that time.

It was not just learning about Korean culture that she gained through exposure to this community, but also the more politicized questions about the meaning of being Asian American (this student organization was made up of primarily Korean Americans and Chinese Americans), and perhaps more specifically being an Asian American Christian. These questions that arose, came from a turning point in this religious and Asian American student organization, questions that pushed Cecilia to confront the role and importance of a race specific organization, its purpose and function:

And it was whether or not to become affiliated with Intervarsity. So K had started out as an independent church movement that became a student organization. And we were trying to decide whether we would become affiliated with Intervarsity because Intervarsity had more resources, more stable and that sort of thing. And so, then the question was do we be an Asian chapter of Intervarsity of the campus? What does it mean that we are an Asian chapter? So we're not being exclusive but there are experiences of the Asian American that bring us closer together and that there are unique ties. I feel like I can answer it now and I don't think... I could've answered it as much in college because... I recognized that Asian Americans have a different experience, but I couldn't express it clearly. I didn't know exactly how, what is it about Asians that, about the Asian American experience, that is, that is different from the American experience. And I think now, in seminary, and especially with a friend who is very, who works very hard for racial justice, I was forced in seminary to articulate it more, to express it more.

Cecilia emphasizes again here, the important role that education had in aiding her understanding of herself in terms of her identity and desires, but also understanding larger structural factors behind racial identities. Cecilia's experience as a leader of this ethnic religious organization and her education in seminary affirms Trieu's (2009) research that shows how ethnic studies and ethnic organizations can empower ethnic minorities. Experiences like Cecilia's also adds to

Trieu's acknowledgement of how religious identity may strengthen the affirmation of ethnic identity.

Reggie is a 23-year-old college student working towards his Bachelor of Science. Reggie was born in northern Indiana but grew up primarily in eastern Michigan and moved to Ohio to pursue his undergraduate degree. Reggie grew up with mostly white friends because "in general, the population was white." Reggie spent a significant amount of time thinking about his ethnic and racial identity. However, he also credits his skateboarding culture as being a powerful influence in his life, shaping his middle and high school years. When asked about how he would describe skateboarding culture, he shared its diversity,

It's very open. Like, in skateboarding, if you go to a skate park, you'll find people from all different socioeconomic classes and different race, different background. So, you meet a lot of diverse people. There are older people who have normal jobs 9 to 5 who skateboard.

However, beginning in high school, Reggie became interested in exploring more about his Asian American identity and Asian American culture. When asked about what spurred on this interest, Reggie shared:

When I was in middle school, that's when I started really getting racism. I mean they were like little things like in the cafeteria, things that most Asian Americans got it going on. Whether it's a "c" word or stuff like that. That stuff like it hurt but I was like whatever... Yeah it was verbal stuff, whether it was said to me or behind my back. But then I think 7th or 8th grade my best friend growing up, he was the one we were skateboarding a lot together and stuff... From my neighborhood. So, we got into a little fight. It was stupid. So, I did something that upset him. Looking back, it wasn't any wrong in my end, but I guess he took it the wrong way and things. So, there was a skateboarding event, him and his friends were there. Some of them were my friends. I was going to meet up with them and then when I got there, he was like, "hey look guys it's china!" That was the first time I felt wounded, betrayed, hurt. I was like stunned. I didn't know what to do. I'd never gotten that. I mean I guess I'd gotten similar things but not from my best friend... Yeah. And the guys he was with were the cool, the older high school skaters and stuff, so yeah, I guess I wanted to impress them and stuff. Just like, wow, what do I do? So, it was really awkward. I just stood there for a little and then I just left. And so that kind of, the first time I was very upset at the time. Yeah, very unsure of myself and things. I think that started the whole thing, me realizing I'm different and like,

what does that mean? At that time, my family, we went to Korea. I think that summer. So, few months later. Then I was like, ok, do I fit in here? Then I realized I'm not REALLY Korean. Like I don't exactly fit in here either. That's when I started thinking about identity and things. Yeah and in high school there's racism and whatever. I don't think any of it was as bad as what happened in middle school.

This experience of betrayal pushed Reggie emotionally, psychologically and intellectually to find answers and hope. It was first by finding *AngryAsianMan.com* online that led him into reading and learning more about social justice, equality, and racism from individuals like Malcom X.

Reggie explained how it all began,

I think the internet guided me to all that. One link leads to another link. There's so much on the internet. Yeah. I took African American studies in high school. Asian American studies in college. I thought maybe that's what I wanted to do too, to explore identity, bring about what I thought was justice to fight injustice. Things I saw in the media against minorities. So that was kind of my whole thing.

In line with Trieu's (2009) respondents whose ethnic identities were strengthened through ethnic studies, Reggie felt "a sense of pride" learning about the history of Asian Americans, and the first waves of immigrants and Asian American involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, but "sometimes it just made me more angry... Some ways it was helpful. Some ways it just kinda spread more hatred in me toward people who I thought were instigating it. So, it's kind of double sided." While Reggie's ethnic identity was affirmed through education, he struggled with learning the reality of a racist American society.

One pattern in Reggie's life is that his Christian community was always his Korean American community. This moment of painful betrayal for him in middle school and into high school pushed him to find community elsewhere, outside of the skateboarding culture. In recognizing that this overt othering was pinpointed at his racial identity compelled him look for true belonging, which to him was not with Korean or white Americans. Interestingly, Reggie explains,

But then at [college in Ohio], I don't know how it happened, but all the people I was meeting were Asian American. All my friends became Asian American, through Asian American intervarsity, through church, or classes like, we just seemed to naturally find each other, come together.

Reggie was not the only respondent who could not explicitly explain how it ended up being that their closest friends and community was made up of primarily, if not solely, Asian Americans (Kibria 1999). For many it was not identifiable as a conscious decision, but rather it was somehow a subconsciously led result, just as Kibria (1999) found in her respondents as well. I would argue that although possibly subconscious, this is not a random outcome, but rather an outcome fueled by the experiences of othering, and the sense of belonging amongst others who share your ethnicity or racial identity to whom you do not need to explain yourself or your experiences to.

Similarly, Adele confidently stated, when asked how she would describe her community during college, "Yeah I would definitely say Asian American was probably the #1 description I would use. My friends are there. And just different because I hadn't ever had such like, I don't know, access or like so many people from that shared that background." The experience of being around so many with her shared background gave her accessibility she never knew or had before. It was a new and yet was a very welcomed part of her college experience. For Adele, she describes this as a "subconscious" decision, but that subconsciously, she could not deny she felt very "comfortable in this environment." Though not knowing where it came from, this "feeling" could not be found elsewhere.

Unlike prior respondents, Hannah thought very deliberately and consciously about her community and friend groups. Hannah was a 24-year-old curator for a biological resource center, who has lived in Ohio for the entirety of her life, up to that point. Hannah explained in detail how she made decisions about community in her college years:

So... before I went into college, I was thinking like, alright, I really don't think it's possible to have like a core white community and a core Asian community like unless it like happens, it'd be great, but chances are, especially at the beginning, you have to pick one or the other. So, I actually gave it a lot of thought before because like sure, I was surrounded by white community, of course, it's Ohio, but like I also went to Korean church. So like I understand how the Asian network works. It's like you put yourself in the Asian network and you're there forever. Haha. So, like it's like, if I put myself in the Asian network, it's gonna be like everyone will know me, ok, there's a, and it will definitely feel like community cuz Asians are super good at that, super community. But you know I think there's a lot of like, well I guess I was also thinking like Asians who hang out with only Asians, like you know that and also like, but I did end up being one of those Asians. Like I ended up choosing to be part of the Asian American community at [college] and it was a blast. As I predicted, I didn't have like a core white community. It was mostly my Asian American community. Not even Asian international, it's Asian American. And actually, not Korean American, Asian American. Mostly Chinese American actually. And I think first I really give my undergrad credit for really increasing my awareness of what it means to be a missional Christian⁵. Just being a Christian... being surrounded by Christian community always and it really gave me a view of what it means to be missional and go out there and to like talk to people who are different from you. And college is where I realized racial boundaries are actually pretty easy to cross, like really easy compared to socioeconomic boundaries. Because also in college it's like so easy to be friends across like cultural barriers I feel like just because everybody is a college student and everyone is at the same level. It's like after I got out of college, I began meeting people outside that socioeconomic status like it's like hard to build relationships there intentionally. Also I give college credit for letting me grow in my Asian American identity. Just because like I know some people's awareness level's like literally you know sometimes I feel like 50% American and 50% Asian which is like duh. But I know some people literally like that cuz they haven't thought about it. Like I didn't have that awareness but I really grew in that understanding of what it means to be Asian American and yeah, it's like I'm not the only one who feels like this and like I knew cuz there's so many Asians at [college], like friends that I became close to and like people I talk to. And then so college was fun.

Hannah's thinking of the impossibility of having both a white group of friends and an Asian group of friends is revealing first about what potential friend groups she imagined she could have but also the choices she thought she needed to make. This is revealing of the racial and ethnic insularity she perceives and personally subscribes to. She certainly has a strong view of the cohesiveness of an Asian community and network. She also alludes to a negative connotation of

⁵ By 'missional Christian,' this respondent means being a Christian who engages with non-Christians about each other's beliefs.

Asians who are seen as solely having community with those of the same race or ethnicity as themselves. Despite this, Hannah chooses to be an Asian American with only Asian American friends. Hannah explains her logic as:

As long as they're not the ONLY [white] one, just so they wouldn't feel like the odd one out. But like if there was like white people especially in Ohio and really most of them would feel really uncomfortable. And like I knew that and if they feel uncomfortable, they're not gonna go and specifically make Asian friends unless they're like suddenly into Korean dramas and kpop and be like specifically talk about those things. So like interest in Asian culture, ok, but like general white person wouldn't be. And so like I knew that so I knew that if I had mostly Asian friends, chances are I wouldn't have a lot of white friends. I'll have a few scattered white friends from my classes, work, but like, but they wouldn't merge with the Asian community that I had. Cuz you know if there was like a sorority fraternity it's a communities kind of merge right! Whereas Asian community and then say oh my work friends and it's like it's not going to merge very easily and I knew that. And then like um yeah so, I just it's not from an Asian standpoint, it's from like the white standpoint, I think. And not even black and Hispanic or other race because like I think if there's like pretty even distribution, they'd be totally normal about it but like there aren't that many of them either you have to like go out and look for that kind of community.

Furthermore, Hannah makes a clear distinction between Asians and Asian Americans, and emphasizes that her community that she consciously chose was made up of Asian Americans.

Being around a larger group of individuals of the same ethnicity has helped Hannah to grow in her sense of being an Asian American. It was not simply being around more Asian Americans that led to this, but the similarity in lived experience that drew her closer to other Asian Americans. The number of individuals sharing this experience was as important as the experiences themselves. Hannah elaborates:

I was thinking about it and I was like well you know it's like basically my whole life until now, um I was part of, I just surrounded myself with mostly white community just because that was my option. And like probably after graduation from college, that is what will happen naturally, so I was like, why not while I'm in college, just like take advantage of the fact there's a huge number of Asians here. Just like let me live in that for a time in my life. Cuz I knew like I specifically picked an Asian church for the Asian community which necessarily isn't my style. Like it'd be harder to find that outside of college. So that's why I chose it.

Furthermore, Hannah attributes her time in college and her religion with compelling her to interact with those who are different from her. She elaborates on the kind of difference that she encountered—that is, racial difference as relatively feasible compared to socioeconomic difference.

Susan describes a similar strength she has also found in ethno-religious Asian American communities:

My freshman year I tried to make friends with my suitemates and roommates and I was friends with them and then my Korean friend that I went to high school with invited me to the Korean Christian fellowship and I didn't want to get sucked in and I got totally totally sucked in. And then pretty much the whole rest of the time was like only with Asian people, Asian Christians and my whole life was the Asian Christian fellowship. But I'm really glad because I had a wonderful experience and I think it was a healing experience in terms of culture too. Because yeah, it's interesting, now I realize how much the church helped me stay connected to Korean culture. Cuz I had all the Korean friends I had wished for so much as a kid and I had all that socialization and I finally felt like not weird and not different, like I felt like I was seen as a person in that group, so maybe that is why I was so sucked in to it. And probably my mom too, she devoted her life to the Korean church is that maybe she felt that way too, she felt really lonely, for sure for first couple years in Youngstown. She told me a story one time. She took us to McDonald's and sit us like I was like 4 or 5 or I was 6 years old and Christina was a baby and Ruth was like 3. And she'd sit us up pretend like we were her friends. And she would sit at McDonald's and have a conversation with us like "oh, would you like a" ...cuz she was so lonely! Haha. Hard time!

Susan speaks first about a desire to befriend her non-Asian suitemates, but after being invited to a Korean Christian fellowship group, she was drawn in, "sucked in," as she describes, and that became her college community. It was through this fellowship group that Susan also healed from the traumatic racism she experienced in her childhood. Through this specifically Korean and Christian fellowship, Susan was able to experience the belonging and sense of community that she never felt before. She learned from this community how it feels to be seen as a whole person because before growing up in Youngstown, Ohio, she was never accepted or viewed as a whole person because of her ethnic and racial identity. Even Susan explains that perhaps it was this first

sense of belonging and community that truly enticed her to become a part of this group, instead of being drawn elsewhere. She experienced the community and sense of self that she had always longed for but never had the opportunity to experience, having grown up in a predominantly white and hostile environment.

Daniel had another reason for having a strongly Asian community during college. He first described his college community as:

Very Asian for sure. Same interests as me, so basketball all the time. That was pretty much it honestly. I had some church friends. People that I know from [Camp W] that went to Ohio State too, so I hung out with them as well. I started to—because I was falling away from the Lord, I started hating myself, I started hanging out with some of my fringe Christian friends. So I didn't like to party or anything, but just went to church when I felt like it. Played basketball, like literally five days of the week probably.

[Q: Were these friends mostly second-generation, or all second-generation?]
Yeah. Yeah.

[Q: And were they all Korean, or were there other ethnicities?]
There were some other ethnicities, but mostly Korean.

[Q: Okay. Was it a deliberate choice to make friends with other people who were Asian American, or do you feel like that was just something that happened?]
It just kinda happened. I think it was probably the underlying mistrust of non-Asian people. So it was just natural.

[Q: So that mistrust –you did mention that earlier—because you were made fun of a lot by kids at school that were mostly white. Is that what you're talking about when you say that now?]
Yeah. That's where it comes from.

Daniel's experience with racism as a young child painfully carried through to his college years, which led to a deep mistrust of white people, thus pushing him towards an Asian American, specifically Korean American college community. Like Daniel, Emily, a 21-year-old who was born in Indiana but grew up in Michigan and Ohio, also made friends with other Korean Americans during college, but was connected with them from her high school years at her Korean ethnic church as well:

My friends. At [college], actually most of my friends are Korean. I don't know if that's because, it's probably because it's the same people I knew going into college before I started. I guess I kind of branched out, but not like that much. I just got closer like to the friends that I had. And they were mostly from the Korean church community back at home in Akron, Cleveland area... Actually most of us ended up here, it's weird how it happened. It's kind of cool but it also makes you not search out for new friends.

These earlier connections made with co-ethnics root deeply, if they have access to them, and provide access for community later on, for example during college. This pattern speaks to the depth of relationships amongst co-ethnics for these respondents.

Fundamental Growth in Faith During College

Sandra, a 45-year-old who grew up in Illinois and has lived in Wisconsin and Illinois as an adult, had an extremely nuanced understanding of herself as an Asian American and has given much of her time to a blog on being a Korean American Christian woman in Illinois:

But we all knew with the others and I share that because it's been a point as I've gotten older reflecting on what I believe and so high school was a matter of trying to get out of high school and never return to my home town. And I didn't get very far. I got to Evanston, IL which is only an hour away... and that was the first time I met a group of Asian American Christians with whom I can talk about what it was like growing up in a white dominant culture. Even at church having grown up at church and being a part of youth group, that was more like what I did on Wednesday nights or on Sunday and, but they were not the people I was living around and hang out with. So, in college it was such a different experience to have people around me 24/7 who were like me and had grown up in church or were going to church who had a curiosity about faith who were curious about Jesus and also very thoughtful people and that was so fascinating to me. It was also the first time I saw an Asian woman preach. And it was like a bright light for bugs and I would've been the bug. And I was I still remember Joann Wang who is now Joann Wang Lam getting up and I don't remember the text, nothing, but like she stood up on an ottoman and she was like, "I am woman, here me roar!" And I thought, oh, I gotta stick around for this! So fascinating! And so, I stuck around with that group, it was Asian American Christian fellowship and then my junior, senior year affiliated with Intervarsity. And it was there as a student my faith became my own and I began to understand what it is to be Korean American and Asian American. It was the first time I really identified myself as Asian American. And I really loved it. It was a great 4 years.

Like for Sandra, college also was a fundamental time of religious growth for some respondents, as well. For Sandra, it was seeing an Asian woman preacher, a person who shared her race and

religion, that encouraged her religious identity. As mentioned earlier, there has long been a fear that youth will walk away from their religion or faith during their college years (Ketcham 2012; McDowell, 2006; Reid, 2004; Wright 2007). There are important exceptions to this, however.

Emily experienced a strengthening of her religious idea during college, and she explains what she believes led to this: “College, I feel like, just like the opportunities I’ve had to serve and I guess college is where you’re completely independent from what your parents have told you your whole life and you get to choose what church you go to and you get complete freedom so it’s very raw and you have to be real with yourself. So I think in that way I think I was able to grow a lot too and see what, how I can be used too as an individual. Instead of just going to church. College has been the first time I’ve been able to serve as a camp counselors and have leadership too within the church too.” She described the strengthening of her faith during college as having grown “exponentially.” Daniel and Adele expressed their religious identity similarly as Emily. Daniel said, “Yeah. I knew what it felt like to be a prodigal, that’s what college did for me. And I knew, and began to understand after what it meant for God to be my father and to accept me. Even more so than just the head knowledge, I was able to experience him in a deeper way. So yeah, it had a major effect.” And Adele explained how college affected her religious identity: “It solidified my belief in God and matured my understanding of him. And like worship became a very important part I think at that point.”

Susan also experienced a drastic strengthening of her religious idea during college. Susan describes the way that she practiced her religious identity during college that led to such a strengthening of her faith:

And then in college, my Christian experience really formed me, like I really focused on that a lot... I spent a lot of time soul searching in college and mainly through spiritual study and prayer, like tons of prayer and spiritual study and like meditating and discipline. It was like nun monastery kind of stuff. I didn’t get drunk once in college. I

spent like the whole time praying and doing good deeds and fasting and things like that. People always, when I say stuff like that, they think I'm crazy or I'm really weird. And it is like actually compared to today like how people experience college, it is a really weird experience. And 8 of my friends are pastors. And 4 of them are married to pastors. I spent a very religious time in college... so like the fellowship somebody would be like, ok we're gonna rent out, not rent out, we're gonna schedule out this one classroom every morning if you want to do morning prayer. And of course, nobody did that except me. Haha. So I would do it officially through the fellowship but we were like one or two people there. Like stuff I did by myself like I would do prayer walks around the campus. Or I used to, whenever I chose to fast, I would use my meal punches to buy food for people and go visit them and bring them like a muffin or some kind of treat. And or I would, I did a lot of reading and meditating by myself of the bible. And or I would just like try to think of ways to talk to people on campus about God. I remember it would be raining and I carried an umbrella around and I would walk people to class. Or like sit at the bus stop and talk to people...I don't do any of that stuff anymore! Haha. I was so passionate. I think part of it, I was really grateful to be in college. I was really grateful cuz high school was so difficult. I felt so hopeless and impoverished in high school but when I got to college, I felt so lucky and blessed that I wanted to in some ways give back to God too. And I wanted to really, I was so excited to be surrounded by people my own age and peers. I really just reveled it...College was like a wonderful time for me.

Another respondent who explained in great detail how her years of college contributed to her religious identity and a strengthening of it was Callie:

So, I went to college and it was really really hard. Very discouraging at first because every person literally that I met like, it was like, our conversation would be like, oh what's your name? Where are you from? What are you majoring in? And then the next question was always do you drink? Or do you like to party? Blah blah blah. And I wasn't about that. I was pretty rebellious in high school for a little bit. And I already tried drinking and stuff... I was going to a Jesuit University so I was kind of half expecting to meet someone remotely similar with common ground but didn't happen. As a result, I spent a lot of time like my personal time with God and I went to IHOPs [International House of Prayer⁶] everyday. And a lot of times I just sat there just soaking in that, other times I would pray, other times I read my Bible. And then I watched one broadcast sermon a day while eating lunch because it was like 30 to 40 minutes long which was a perfect amount of time for me to do that, in between classes, things like that. Yeah so that year was probably extremely crucial because I never grew so much within one year and I finally start to see like all the prophetic word I received before that in terms of like, God really speaking to me through His word and all these different things. I was also a part of youth staff that had such an impact on people. So I got to serve in worship team.

⁶ <https://www.ihopkc.org/>. The International House of Prayer is a charismatic Christian movement and missions organization based in Kansas City, Missouri. They are best known for having a 24/7 prayer room with live worship teams, which is also broadcasted through their website. This institution runs a Bible school, music academy, a music institute, and an annual conference.

Callie spent a significant amount of time, like Susan, on her faith and practices of it. However, for Callie, it was as a result of not finding the community that she had initially expected and hoped to find in college. Callie was so enthusiastic about her new-found religious community and identity that she was willing to take a two-hour commute to church. Callie also explains how her faith and her view of God influenced all areas of her life and her decisions, including her relationships and career path.

So, my freshman year... [it was] like a 2-hour commute to church every weekend by the train. So I would take the train down on Fridays, stay at somebody's house, through Sunday and take the train back up on Sundays after church. As a result, I didn't really have much time to make friends at school because most of college students hang out on weekends and stuff. Um but it was worth it for me, just because I really found a ministry I really believed in and inspired me even way back when... So freshman and sophomore year, I committed myself to God for those 2 years and I said, I'm not gonna date. First year was all about identity and literally like every sermon I would listen to or anywhere I would go, a retreat or some random conference out in California, like the theme would be identity. It was really weird. So God took me on a journey of what it means to be, for my identity to be founded on who he is. And really rebuilding myself. And um yeah and then my second, my sophomore year was all about dreaming big... I was originally pre-med, and I just really did not like biology... It didn't matter how much I studied. Nothing was working. So, I was like, God, what are You doing? I'm trying to read though my all this stuff, but academics are like one thing that I'm good at.

Callie's religious and faith language is naturally embedded into her description of her time in college. For Callie, it was clear that for her, faith is central and from it stems the rest of her life, like career and dating.

Conclusion

While there are certainly youth who walk away from their faith or religious background when they enter into college, there are also those who have an opposite reaction to entering college. For these respondents, their religious identity was actually strengthened. One reason for the strengthening of religious identity was actually access to a co-ethnic community in college for the first time in their lives, which facilitated a move from being an isolated ethnic to being an

everyday ethnic (Trieu 2018). Both the camp experience and college experience for these second-generation Korean American Christians strengthened both their religious and ethnic identities simultaneously because it is in these ethno-religious spaces that they found comfort and belonging. This transition to a new space, and transition to a closer proximity to co-ethnics and/or a familiar racial community, came in the form of a religious community and context for these second-generation Korean Americans who grew up in the Midwest (and who largely went to college also in the Midwest.) Through the role of church on the weekends (isolated ethnics), or a church camp once a year (isolated ethnics), or a college Christian fellowship (everyday ethnics), it is evident how the absence of community had serious consequences that deeply affected self-perceptions, including internalized racial oppression, and other forms of racism. Furthermore, how the presence of community has serious impact on again, self-perception, that leads to healing through a sense of belonging, a confidence in their racial and ethnic identity.

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CONCLUSION: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND MOVING FORWARD

This value for authenticity now frames the questions “Who am I?” and “Where do I belong?” for the new second generation of Asian Americans and Latinos. Their racialized status as outsiders, foreigners, and “probationary Americans” challenges their claim to be truly American (Park and Park 2005). At the same time, racialized multiculturalism and religious pluralism afford them discourses and institutional sites to resist this marginalization and to claim identity in America. By making use of religious, racial, and ethnic resources, the new second generation is staking its claim in America and perhaps forging a new “American Way of Life” (p. 20).

- Jeong, Chen, and Park (2012), “Religious, Racial and Ethnic Identities of the New Second Generation.”

Overview

Abby, who grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, expressed embarrassment towards other Asians and Asian Americans, and how she lives with distance from other Asians and Asian Americans. Abby shared, “I don’t really like being with other Asians, as much as it sounds weird. I feel it’s harsh to say, but I just don’t because they just annoy me. I feel like it’s sort of like... embarrassed? They’re like embarrassing to be around them.” Jack, who was born in South Korean but grew up in West Lafayette, Indiana, experienced discrimination and racism both as a young soccer player and as a student at a Christian university in Ohio. While he experienced constantly being othered in predominantly white spaces, when he worked at a Korean church in Ohio, he found a sense of belonging. He shared that he “fe[lt] more at home. Like I feel... the kids are more, kids are going through what I went through, so the job feels a lot better.” Sandra, who is now a Campus Minister in Illinois, had shared how she experienced the sting of racism throughout her life and that it was in college that she came to see herself more strongly as a Christian and Korean American: “it was there as a student my faith became my own and I began to understand what it is to be Korean American and Asian American. It was the first time I really identified myself as Asian American. And I really loved it.” Susan who grew up in Youngstown

being beaten up and tormented by white students, who was rejected even by her teachers, also experienced healing from finding individuals who did accept her, and from her Korean church in Virginia that gave her a community of protection. Susan's college experience also helped her to heal from the racism she experienced:

And then pretty much the whole rest of the time was like only with Asian people, Asian Christians and my whole life was the Asian Christian fellowship. But I'm really glad because I had a wonderful experience and I think it was a healing experience in terms of culture too. Because yeah, it's interesting, now I realize how much the church helped me stay connected to Korean culture. Cuz I had all the Korean friends I had wished for so much as a kid and I had all that socialization and I finally felt like not weird and not different, like I felt like I was seen as a person in that group, so maybe that is why I was so sucked in to it.

The experiences of Abby, Jack, Sandra, and Susan illuminate why deeply examining the Midwest matters. Their experiences help us see that the Midwest must be re-defined to more accurately reflect the lived experiences of all people who inhabit this region. These forty-seven respondents begin to fill in some gaps in a wider portrait of marginalized experiences in the Midwest. These narratives furthermore affirm that yes, the second-generation are resisting marginalization and claiming identity in America through religious, racial, and ethnic resources and communities (Jeong, Chen, and Park 2012).

Re-defining the Midwest for this project means understanding that social capital and pre-existing networks, whether through family or friends, are key factors in why and how Korean immigrants are ending up in the Midwest region, as opposed to the more popular immigrant destinations (Massey 1999). Even without an ethnic enclave, these immigrants made meaningful connections with co-ethnics who came before them. The strength of these networks and the pull of economic opportunities were strong enough for some respondents' families to leave the coast to come to the Midwest (Massey 1999). The Midwest was not always the first destination, and what eventually drew these families to the Midwest was primarily education or economic

reasons. The most common reason that these families made the decision to immigrate was for what they described as a “better life,” education, or for various “opportunities.” Another pattern that became evident from hearing these immigration narratives was the direct impact that American military presence has on these Korean immigrants’ decisions to move to the United States. Many were able to come to the United States because of relatives who married American soldiers, and who sponsored their immigration. Furthermore, certain individuals chose to immigrate after their international blind-dating, or “sogaeting,” experience. These individuals chose, often after a very short time, to move across the world to start a new life with their new spouses.

Re-defining the Midwest also means recognizing, that as for the earliest Korean immigrants, the church continues to play an essential role in finding identity and community in the Midwest. The legacy of the impact of American missionaries in Korea in the 1800s has been the establishment of Korean churches throughout the United States (Chan 1990, Yoo 2010). Churches are providing elements of belonging for Korean Americans today, in ways that echo how churches did the same for the first wave of Korean immigrants to Hawaii in 1903 (Yoo 2010). This connection is sobering in revealing how a sense of belonging remains an elusive element of daily life for Korean Americans in the Midwest, outside of their ethnic communities. However, this parallel history is also a reminder that there are communities of belonging to be found and they can be created.

This project goes beyond acknowledging that racism occurs against Asian Americans in the Midwest and shows the long-term consequences of racism. Many respondents recalled moments of racism that happened ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. They remember the feeling of being hurt and ostracized, they remember who was involved, they remember the context of the

situation. These moments build up cumulatively, and for some, they have a collection of remembered hurts from the past. Susan is one person who remembers vividly her painful experiences even from elementary school. One response to racism, like for Susan's sister and Jack, is the desire to leave the Midwest for an environment of racial and ethnic diversity. Another response is to actively fix what is wrong, like Susan who responded to her experiences with racism with a desire to change society through her high school English classroom.

This project also highlights how Korean American Christians in the Midwest are responding to racism. This project illuminates how religious identity, and the faith that one has, can play a role in helping individuals process racism and accept their ethnic identity instead of rejecting it (Yoo 2010). There is a powerful way in which respondents see an opportunity to be a "bridge" across race, ethnicity, and generation, within a church context. For Cecilia, being educated in seminary about race and identity gave her the language to understand her own experiences of racism as well as fuel her desire to help other Korean Americans in their own struggles with identity, through the church (Trieu 2009). Religious identity helped some respondents accept their ethnic and racial identities as having purpose and uniqueness. Finding an ethnic community through the church, was also an avenue of healing from experiences of racism for these respondents (Yoo and Chung 2008). And several of these individuals want to help the Korean American church, as they recognize areas of needed growth in the Korean American churches they grew up in and have attended.

Some respondents even saw their experiences of racism in the Midwest as helping them to learn how to interact with and accept people who are different from them. However, for other respondents, some form of rejecting their ethnic or racial identity is the only way they know how to respond to their marginalized identity. Abby's articulation of herself and her identity further

reveals how the perpetuation of racism can come from minorities themselves when any form of oppression becomes internalized (Pyke 2010, Pyke and Dang 2003, Trieu and Lee 2018). To have such negative views towards one's own ethnic and racial population, is in turn a negative view towards one's own identity. The United States is not in a post-race state, and racism is happening and leaving a trail of serious consequences. While racism against Asian Americans exists in the Midwest, Korean American Christians are also finding ways to better understand themselves and to find healing in broken spaces.

Furthermore, community and a sense of belonging are confirmed to be critical (Kiang and Supple 2016, Trieu 2018). Meaningful community is a critical means towards finding restoration and reconciliation with oneself and with others. For Korean American Christians in the Midwest the most prominent way that they participated in such a community and did find a sense of belonging was specifically in ethno-religious spaces. The impact that one week, every year, spent with fellow Korean American Christian youth, can have is powerful. It was often the first time these young Korean Americans saw such a large concentration of fellow Korean Americans, and the first time that they had such impactful spiritual experiences. This was the first time many of these youth were not in the minority. During this one week of camp, Korean American Christians were able to recognize that they were not alone, that they can be understood, and that there are others who welcome and accept them. Having this week to spend with co-ethnics recharged these youth. Moreover, there is such anticipation to return to this summer camp just to experience that belonging once again.

The college years are pivotal for many, and this has been well documented (Kibria 1999, Trieu 2009). For Korean American Christians who grew up in the Midwest, it was critical for deeper understanding and acceptance of both ethnic and religious identities (Bankston and Zhou

1996). An important avenue that allowed this to happen were ethno-religious organizations and ethnic churches that these college students participated in (Kim 2004, Kim 2006, Park 2013). Some even discuss the strength and pull of these groups as ‘inescapable’ though they initially did not want to get sucked into it. These narratives of community life further emphasize how specifically ethno-religious campus communities can be a fundamental step towards a strengthening of one’s identity, and halting the perpetuation of internalized oppression. Participation in these communal spaces largely strengthened both ethnic identity and religious identity in a different way than at Camp W. During college, these Korean Americans had the opportunity to pursue religion independently from their parents and families, and several respondents shared how this independence shaped who they are as Christians later in life (Kibria 1999, Park 2012). Ellen’s narrative is an important anomaly that serves to remind us that even in one’s own ethnic and religious community, acceptance and belonging is not always experienced. While Ellen did not completely escape or reject Korean Americans or Christians, her experience highlights how acceptance does not happen in only one way or solely amongst people who share your ethnic or religious identity.

Ultimately, from immigration to the lives of the second-generation, this research shows that proximity to an ethnic community, and religious identity cannot be underestimated. These Korean Americans have found their own spaces in the midst of an unwelcoming context, after and while continuing to experience racism. These narratives show patterns of resilience through ethno-religious communities.

Forward Thinking

This research project is a contribution to scholarship, and it reveals what further research can and should be done. There is still much more to understand about how and why various

minority populations are choosing to live in areas with low population share. What is their decision-making process like, what are the factors that they consider, and how are they migrating? How are networks being created, that lead to migration to the Midwest? In what ways do migration and the reasons for migration today, in 2018, look different than they did fifty years ago? A larger comparative study of Asian American experiences in low and high population share places would be revealing to further understand the impact and consequences of levels of access to co-ethnic populations. While there do exist studies on Asian Americans in the Midwest and in the South, these studies do not make explicit comparisons with Asian American experiences in more populous parts of the United States. This kind of study would require many resources, including time and funding, but the results would create nuance in patterns of immigration, adaptation and assimilation, strategies and forms of community building, intricacies of belonging, second-generation identity, intergenerational relationships, contexts of reception, religiosity and religious identities, types of racism and responses to racism. The outcome of such research would be incredibly far-reaching and lead to further depth of understanding in what specific ways space and place affect how individuals understand themselves.

My research project shows that there is much to explore in how religious identity is a factor in understanding and processing ethnic identity and racism. Again, comparing how religious identity affects responses to racism in low population share places compared to high population share locations would be important and revealing. Will there be differences between how Korean Americans respond compared to other Asian Americans? And, how is ethnic identity being discussed by non-Protestant Christian minorities? How do non-Protestant Christian minorities respond to racism and make sense of their minority identities? Moreover,

several respondents have shown how the church can be a space where *bridges* are built to further facilitate understanding and acceptance. There is still much to understand about *how* this work is being done in the Korean American and Asian American contexts, and what struggles persist, and what strategies have succeeded. How are these individuals learning about ethnic identity and race and racism in the United States? There is also much work that can be done from a religious and theological perspective, on how the church should be further educated on issues of race and identity in society. In addition to providing community and belonging, for the church to be well-versed in how race functions in U.S. society in the lived experiences of their minority congregation members has potential for being an even greater force in fighting racism.

Personal Reflection

I am encouraged that Korean Americans in the Midwest have found spaces where they have found comfort and healing and reconciliation. I am encouraged by listening to how education was a key factor in one's process of politicization and better understanding who they are as a minority in the United States and being able to name racism as racism. I am angry at how there are still pockets within the Midwest where there is so little acceptance of non-white people, and that so many of my respondents had to suffer through such extreme racist experiences, without resources to help them. I am angry and saddened at the incredibly painful descriptions of internalized racial oppression, and how racism can become perpetuated by the oppressed, without them understanding this process.

And I am grateful. The most rewarding part of this dissertation has been listening to these individuals who were willing to share their experiences and their lives with me, to be understood and known. They shared with me who they are, who they think they are, who they have been, what they have learned, what they have suffered through, and how they make sense of the world

and their lives. Each person is aiming for change, for whatever it is that they care about, each person is doing something to get there.

However, I am not blind to the flaws of the church that were revealed through these experiences and histories. Racism exists outside of the church, as well as inside the church. And answers were not given to these individuals from the church, where many of them find meaning and belonging. Jack stands out as a young man who experienced racism and discrimination at a personal and institutional level. Experiences like his show significant areas of needed growth within the church. While academics are deeply invested in fighting inequality like racism, and finding different ways to understand the nuances of what race is and how racism functions and why, where is the church in their understanding of these systems? That is not to say that the church has never understood or responded to these problems. There have been incredible intersections of religion and activism. However, from my respondents, it is clear that there is a long way to go and a lot of work still yet to be done, especially from an Asian American perspective. I am grateful for what has been shared with me, for me to get a glimpse into the work that needs to be done. My hope is that understanding Korean American Christians and their life in the Midwest sheds light on how together we can better care for each other.

Where is the church in understanding Asian American identity? In recent years, evangelical circles (in both conservative and more liberal arenas) have been more interested in understanding racial identity and racism, which is movement in the right direction. On the more liberal end of evangelical Christianity, one nationwide campus organization that even several respondents mentioned was InterVarsity (Park 2013), which has a longer history than other evangelical outlets when it comes to including Asian American identity. InterVarsity began a specific Asian American ministry in 1979. In 1993, the Vice-President and Multiethnic Director

called for a conference for Asian American staff, which was held in Berkeley, California. In 1994, a veteran staff member, Paul Tokunaga was asked to become the first part-time Asian American Ministries Coordinator. In 1998, this new ministry published an in-house resource called *Developing Asian American Leaders*. In 2001, they began addressing specific issues of injustice by inviting speakers to their conference to speak on themes of justice and racial reconciliation. In 2004, Russell Jeong (Asian American Studies department at San Francisco State University) was invited to speak at their conference. InterVarsity has grown in recent years to have Black Campus Ministries, La Fe: Latino Campus Ministries, Women's Ministry, Greek Ministry, and an International Student Ministry ("History" 2018).

Currently, there are 6,198 Asian American students, and 251 Asian American staff at InterVarsity. The Asian American Ministry has expanded to include more South Asian, Hmong and Filipino student communities. In an article arguing for ethnic specific church ministries, Tomikawa (1998) asks about the role of culture in the Christian faith, "Do we all understand the same things when we study scripture? Are we limited in our view? How does our cultural perspective enhance our understanding of God? How does it inhibit it?" He argues, "Ethnic specific ministry offers a strategy to redeem culture, equip and train minority leaders, and reach unchurched people. Ethnic specific ministry enables us to tap creative avenues in developing minority leaders that love, know and understand God. As we learn to understand both the beauty of whom God has made us and to see more clearly the sinfulness of who we are we can join the chorus of believers speaking God's truth to others seeking the redemption of all the nations." Like my respondents also show, as Tomikawa is arguing, there is empowerment in finding religious communities that are ethnicity and race specific. Also, as some respondents have shown, they make sense of their ethnic identities through a religious lens: "the beauty of whom

God has made us.” This awareness of the impact of ethnic and racial identity must be more widespread.

Another example of an evangelical group that is engaging with Asian American identity is Fuller Theological Seminary’s Center for Asian American Theology and Ministry (based in Southern California), also known as the Asian American Center. In 2008, as a doctoral student, Daniel Lee worked towards creating an Asian American Studies component to Fuller’s Theological Seminary (he shared that there had been several failed attempts to establish this center in previous years at this institution). Eventually, as a staff member, he started what is now the Asian American Center. The reason why he saw a need for an Asian American Center at a Seminary is because of questions that continued to arise for him as he studied theology at Princeton. In an interview with him, he shared with me his process of thinking. He shares how he saw theologically strong evangelical leaders missing a critical part of ethnic and racial minority’s identities:

My fiancé was going to Redeemer [Presbyterian Church] in New York and I was like I don’t understand what’s happening here because it’s almost as though when they’re talking about the gospel, it’s not going deep enough. They’re failing to realize that these people are, they are Asian American. They don’t own the fact that they’re Asian American or they don’t really be at peace with that, therefore they can’t really address the fact that Asian Americans have specific struggles and issues. Therefore, the gospel just doesn’t go to those places. So, when Tim Keller [the pastor of Redeemer] says ‘God’s not a boss, He’s a Father,’ and I’m like ‘OK, hold up white man, have you met an Asian father before?’ I mean not that all Asian fathers are like that but at least there’s enough of a cultural influence of what fatherhood is that complicates this issue. And you don’t understand that, therefore you could think this analogy means something, but it doesn’t mean anything at all. So, the fact that you can just say these things without qualifying it, it shows you how disconnected you are from the community, which is actually 50% Asian American.

Therefore, from continually observing moments like these, Lee took matters into his own hands at a Seminary in Southern California. Today, the goal of this Center is to equip students “with a contextualized gospel that enables them to more wisely and fruitfully lead as an Asian American

or in Asian American contexts. In a seminary environment of unmatched global diversity and academic resources, students learn to integrate biblical truth deeply with the complexities of the Asian American experience, identity, community and mission” (“Integrate” 2018). This center is attempting to make clear the value and importance of identifying as an Asian American who is also a Christian, and not putting one identity over the other.

A more conservative evangelical ministry is *The Gospel Coalition* (“About” 2018), a “group of pastors and churches in the Reformed tradition that put the gospel of Jesus Christ at the center of all activities.” This mission is sought through multimedia content, events such as nationwide conferences, books, and international outreach. Of their forty staff members, there are only a handful of non-white individuals. When doing a website search for the term “Asian American,” these article, blog post, conference session titles come up: *Identity, History, and Passivity: Julius Kim and Stephen Um Discuss Challenges for Asian Americans* (2011), *Linsanity and Asian American Christianity* (2012), *Asian Americans Building Healthy Churches* (2010), *The Whitewashing of Hollywood and the Asian-American Response* (2016), ‘*Crazy Rich Asians*’ and *Being Truly Seen* (2018), *Why Asian Americans Struggle to Feel at Home in White-Majority Churches* (2017). The oldest article is from 2010, only eight years ago. “Asian Americans Building Healthy Churches” was a pre-conference in Louisville, Kentucky in 2010. In 2018, there was another pre-conference titled “Reclaiming the Center: Understanding Gospel Centrality for Asian Americans,” and on the website this is described as the “inaugural Asian American conference” put on by *The Gospel Coalition*. While there are more topics such as “racial reconciliation,” “racial justice,” and “racism” that are more prevalent in this ministry, Asian American identity in this context is only beginning to be explored. InterVarsity and Fuller

Theological Seminary's exploration of Asian American Christian identity is an exception from the more general evangelical American population.

Desiring God ("About Us" 1994) is another evangelical resource center that began by one pastor from Minneapolis, John Piper. Like *The Gospel Coalition*, *Desiring God* is an international web ministry. They describe their mission as "to help people everywhere embrace a profound truth that changes everything about life and eternity: You were created for something greater than yourself. You were formed for something awesome and magnificent. You were made to know glory—God's glory. And the deepest longings of the human heart can be fully satisfied by pursuing that glory. In fact, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." From this popular ministry, when searching the term "Asian American," there are no titles that encompass this term, but there are articles that utilize this term in the content: 'Where are You Really From?' (2017), Can Ethnicity Become a Straitjacket? (2017), An Asian and a Caucasian Talk in a Truck (2017), Should We Encourage Interracial Marriage? (2016).

For this ministry, the discussion of Asian Americans is even more recent, in the last few years, although again, there are more resources on racial identity more generally. Furthermore, what is actually nuanced in the discussion "An Asian and a Caucasian Talk in a Truck" is Asian American identity and not Asian identity, which further perpetuates the foreignness of Asian Americans and conflates Asian and Asian American identity (Tuan 1998). Moreover, "Where are You Really From?" and "Can Ethnicity Become a Straitjacket" are only repeated segments from "An Asian and a Caucasian Talk in a Truck," which means there are only two resources in this ministry discussing Asian American identity. Again, while there may be important work being done from these evangelical standpoints to understand and combat racial injustice, these initial searches point to the potential for further education and understanding of diversity especially

looking beyond black and white. From the perspective of Christian churches and theological studies, there are serious efforts being made to address the importance of acknowledging all aspects of identity as intersecting with religious identity. However, it is also clear how these recent efforts are limited in their understanding and have yet to trickle into other arenas of Christian thought and church life. To fight inequality, we must start first with education, including within the church.

Perhaps this project can be one such avenue that is used as a tool to show that together, ethnic and religious identities can be an empowering combination in the lives of minorities. Second-generation Korean American Christians who grew up in the Midwest present the potential for this kind of empowerment.

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Table 1. Selected characteristics of interview respondents

| Name | Age | Ethnic | Race | Gender | Education | SES | Home State | Occupation | Parents Education |
|-------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Skye | 28 | Korean | Korean | F | M.D. | Middle | OH | Medical Resident | <i>F: Ph.D.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Cassie | 22 | Korean | Korean American | F | B.A. | Working | OH | Teacher | <i>F: B.A.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Jack | 20 | Asian | Asian | M | H.S. | Working | IN | College Student | <i>F: Ph.D.; M: Ph.D.</i> |
| Julia | 37 | Korean American | Korean or Asian | F | M.A. | Middle Upper | IL | Stay-at-home Mom | <i>F: H.S.; M: H.S.</i> |
| Amanda | 20 | Korean | Asian American | F | H.S. | Middle | OH | College Student | <i>F: Ph.D.; M: M.A.</i> |
| David | 29 | Korean American | Korean American | M | B.A. | Middle | OH | College Pastor, Seminary Student, Hospital Worker | <i>F: H.S.; M: H.S.</i> |
| Reggie | 23 | Korean American | Korean American | M | H.S. | Working | MI | Church Intern, Missions Organization | <i>F: M.A., M.B.A.; M: B.S.</i> |
| Rachel | 21 | Asian American | Asian American | F | H.S. | Working | MI | College Student | <i>F: M.A.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Janessa | 19 | Korean American | Korean American | F | B.A. | Middle | OH | College Student | <i>F: H.S.; M: M.S.</i> |
| Abby | 21 | Korean American | Asian | F | H.S. | Working | OH | Student, Restaurant Hostess | <i>F: H.S.; M: H.S.</i> |
| Cynthia | 28 | Korean American | Korean American | F | M.A. | Upper Middle | OH | Foreign Service Officer | <i>F: B.A.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Cecilia | 27 | Korean American | East Asian | F | M.A. | Lower Middle | OH | Seminary Student | <i>F: H.S.; M: H.S.</i> |
| Adele | 29 | Korean American | Asian | F | D.O. | Middle | OH | Physician | <i>F: H.S.; M: H.S.</i> |
| Michael | 24 | Korean | Korean | M | B.A. | Middle | OH | Design Engineer | <i>F: M.Div.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Katie | 23 | Korean American | Korean | F | B.A. | Middle | OH | Work Part-Time | <i>F: H.S.; M: H.S.</i> |

Table 1 continued

| Name | Age | Ethnic | Race | Gender | Education | SES | Home State | Occupation | Parents Education |
|-----------|-----|-----------------|-----------------------|--------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Samantha | 21 | Korean American | Asian American | F | B.A. | Middle | OH | College Student | <i>F: H.S.; M: H.S.</i> |
| Ellen | 23 | Korean | Asian | F | B.A. | Middle | OH | Corporate Finance | <i>F: H.S.; M: H.S.</i> |
| Brian | 33 | Korean American | Asian American, Asian | M | D.D.S. | Middle | OH | Dentist | <i>F: Assoc.; M: H.S.</i> |
| Hannah | 24 | Korean | Asian American | F | B.A. | Upper Middle | OH | Associate Curator | <i>F: H.S.; M: H.S.</i> |
| Erin | 20 | Asian | Korean | F | H.S. | Middle | IN | College Student | <i>F: M.B.A.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Adam | 28 | Korean American | Asian | M | M.A. | Middle | WI | Medical Student | <i>F: Ph.D.; M: Ph.D.</i> |
| Matthew | 32 | Korean American | Asian American | M | B.S. | Upper Middle | OH | Ministry, Family Business | <i>F: B.A.; M: B.S.N.</i> |
| Caleb | 21 | Korean American | Asian | M | H.S. | Working | IN | College Student | <i>F: B.A.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Brandon | 21 | Asian | Asian | M | H.S. | Middle | IN | College Student | <i>F: B.A.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Heather | 25 | Korean American | Korean American | F | M.S. | Middle | OH | Medical Student | <i>F: Ph.D.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Daniel | 33 | Korean | Asian | M | B.A. | Working | OH | Seminary Student | <i>F: M.A.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Stephanie | 25 | Korean American | Korean American | F | B.A. | Middle | MO | Program Coordinator for Fulbright Korea | <i>F: M.D.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Susan | 38 | Korean American | Asian | F | M.A. | middle | OH | High School English Teacher | <i>F: B.A.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Grant | 25 | Korean American | Asian | M | B.A. | Middle | OH | Barista | <i>F: B.A.; M: B.A.</i> |
| Angela | 37 | Korean | Asian | F | M.A. | Middle Upper | OH | Homemaker | <i>F: E.S.; M: E.S.</i> |
| Callie | 23 | Korean American | Korean American | F | B.A. | Working | OH | Preschool Assistant Teacher | <i>F: H.S.; M: H.S.</i> |

Table 1 continued

| Name | Age | Ethnic | Race | Gender | Education | SES | Home State | Occupation | Parents Education |
|-----------|-----|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Christina | 29 | American | Korean | F | B.A. | Lower Middle | OH | At home with kids and Counseling M.A. student | <i>F:</i> H.S.; <i>M:</i> H.S. |
| Sandra | 45 | Korean American | nonwhite Asian American | F | B.A. | Upper Middle | IL | Writer and Campus Minister | <i>F:</i> M.A.; <i>M:</i> B.A. |
| Andrew | 52 | Stranger in Korean culture | | M | Ph.D. | Upper Middle | IL | Seminary Student | <i>F:</i> Ph.D.; <i>M:</i> Ph.D. |
| Daisy | 24 | Korean American | Korean | F | B.A. | Middle | OH | Project Manager in Advertising | <i>F:</i> B.A.; <i>M:</i> H.S. |
| Martha | 30 | Korean American | Korean | F | M.A. | Middle | OH | Associate Pastor or Children's Pastor | <i>F:</i> Assoc.; <i>M:</i> H.S. |
| Doug | 33 | Korean American | American | M | M.A. | Middle | WI | Associate Pastor | <i>F:</i> B.A.; <i>M:</i> B.A. |
| Alex | 27 | Korean | Asian | M | B.A. | Middle | OH | Finance | <i>F:</i> M.A.; <i>M:</i> B.A. |
| John | 30 | Korean American | Korean | M | B.A. | Working | OH | Youth Pastor and Bank Teller | <i>F:</i> B.A.; <i>M:</i> B.A. |
| Erica | 23 | Asian American | Asian | F | M.A. | Working | IN | Grad Student | <i>F:</i> Ph.D.; <i>M:</i> Ph.D. |
| Faye | 25 | Korean | Asian | F | M.B.A. | Middle | IN | Business Analyst | <i>F:</i> M.A.; <i>M:</i> M.A. |
| Elisha | 36 | Korean American | Korean | F | M.D. | Middle | OH | Physician | <i>F:</i> H.S.; <i>M:</i> H.S. |
| Alyssa | 32 | Asian American | Korean | F | B.A. | Middle | IL | Faculty Staff | <i>F:</i> B.A.; <i>M:</i> B.A. |
| Brad | 24 | Korean American | Korean | M | B.A. | Middle Upper | IL | Validation Engineer | <i>F:</i> B.A.; <i>M:</i> B.A. |
| Vanessa | 25 | Half Korean, Half Caucasian | Half Korean, Half Caucasian | F | B.A. | Middle | IN | Nurse | <i>F:</i> H.S.; <i>M:</i> Mid.S. |
| Nick | 39 | Korean American | Asian American | M | B.S. | Middle | IL | Technology Domain Lead | <i>F:</i> M.D.; <i>M:</i> B.A. |

Table 1 continued

| Name | Age | Ethnic | Race | Gender | Education | SES | Home State | Occupation | Parents Education |
|---------|-----|---------------------------|--------|--------|-----------|--------|------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Natalie | 23 | More American than Korean | Korean | F | B.A. | Middle | IN | Law Student | F: Ph.D.; M: Ph.D. |

Note: $N=47$ respondents. All names are pseudonyms. Each ethnic and racial identity descriptor is in the respondent's own words.

Gender:

F=Female

M=Male

Parents Education:

F=Father

M=Mother

SES= Socioeconomic Status

Education:

Assoc.= Associate's Degree

B.A.= Bachelor of Arts

B.S.= Bachelor of Science

B.S.N.= Bachelor of Science in Nursing

D.D.S.= Doctor of Dental Surgery

D.O.= Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine

E.S.= Elementary School

H.S.= High School

M.A.= Master of Arts

M.B.A.= Master of Business Administration

M.D.= Doctor of Medicine

M.S.= Master of Science

Mid.S.= Middle School

Ph.D.= Doctor of Philosophy

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Part I: Respondent Background Information

1. Interview
 - a. Date
 - b. Time
 - c. Location
2. Current age
3. Date of birth
4. Generational status
5. Ethnic identity
6. Racial identity
7. Sex
8. Marital status
9. Children
10. Education level
11. Socioeconomic status of
 - a. Self
 - b. Family
12. Education levels of parent(s)
13. Language ability in English, Korean, any other language
14. Place of birth (City, State)
15. Places lived in since birth (City, State), and duration
16. Occupation
17. Contacted through:
 - a. Organization
 - b. Church
 - c. Prior contact

Part II: Semi-structured Questionnaire

Background Details

1. Tell me a bit about your life, hitting the big points, starting with your birth. I just want to get a big picture view of your life.
2. What do you know about your family's immigration history? How your family left, and how they came to the United States, etc.? To the Midwest?
 - a. If they know a lot: how did you come to know all these facts about your family's history? What made you interested or curious?
 - b. If they don't know a lot: why do you think this history hasn't come up in conversation before?
 - c. Parents occupational background

- i. Once in the US?
 - ii. What would you describe was your total household income growing up and whether that's changed over the years?
 1. Were you ever expected to contribute to household earnings growing up? Do you see this as a responsibility?
 - d. How would you describe your relationship with your parents? Did that change over time?
3. What was your neighborhood and school environment like growing up?
 - a. Who were your good friends? How did you see yourself fitting into that particular setting?
 - b. Was it racially mixed or predominantly one race?
4. What were you exposed to in terms of Korean culture and traditions, beliefs, or values, growing up?
 - a. Do you have children? In the future, if you do have children, would it be important for you to pass these traditions along to them? Do you think you know enough to continue on your own, would you say?
 - b. What about American culture? Did you celebrate American holidays and traditions growing up?
5. What does being American mean to you? Do you see yourself as being a part of American culture? Why or why not?
 - a. What does the Midwest mean to you? How big of a role does the Midwest play in how you identify?
6. Did you attend college? Where did you attend? What did you study?
 - a. How would you describe your community there? Your friend group?
7. Transnational ties: have you ever visited Korea? How often?
 - a. Do you have relatives in Korea?
 - i. Do you or your family send remittances to relatives back in Korea? How often?
 - ii. Are you close to your relatives in Korea?
 - b. Do you view Korea as home at all? How much does it shape who you are and how you identify?
8. Where's home for you?
9. What would you say on a scale of 1-5, 5 is fluent, is your Korean language proficiency in terms of reading, writing and speaking?
 - a. Do you think your ability to speak Korean affects your connection to Korean communities or identity?
10. Have you ever been involved in an interracial or interethnic relationship in the past?
 - a. If so, would you mind sharing what the racial or ethnic backgrounds of the people were?
 - b. In your mind, were there any difficulties or hardship that you endured in any of your interracial relationships?
 - c. If not, how important was it for you to date someone who is also Korean? Or Korean American?
11. Are you currently a U.S. citizen?
 - a. Would you say that you're politically active or involved at this point in time?
 - b. Politically, do you consider yourself to be conservative, moderate, or liberal?

Ethnic Identity

12. How do you ethnically identify now?
 - a. Has this changed over the course of your lifetime?
 - i. Did you ever go through a period of time when you wanted to be different or you didn't like who you were?
 - ii. In what ways? Examples?
 - iii. Why do you think you identified differently in those circumstances? What influences those differences in how you identify?
 1. Does it ever change depending on whom you are speaking to or where you are, or who is around you?
 2. Does it change depending on where you are? Your location?
13. What does your ethnic identity mean to you?
 - a. How important is being Korean American to you?
 - b. In your daily life how much do you think about your ethnic identity?
 - c. How often do you find yourself thinking about how your ethnic identity affects you?
14. Do you sense there is something particular about being Korean American in the Midwest?
15. In what ways do you practice your ethnic identity? Do you participate in ethnic holidays or traditions today?
 - a. What are the various components of your ethnic identity?
 - i. For example: language, culture, tradition, appearance, ancestry, and regionality?
 - b. Was it always like this for you? Or has this changed, as you have gotten older?
 - c. Does your family play a role in how you practice your ethnic identity?
 - i. Are there any conflicts with your family over your ethnic identity?
16. Who are your closest friends? List the first name of five close friends, friends you would feel comfortable discussing a personal matter with.
 - a. How many of these friends are Korean American?
 - i. Where did you meet these friends?
 - ii. How many of these friends attend the same school/work as you? The same church as you?
 - b. What are the factors that you think have contributed to you having this group of close friends?
 - c. What are the most important things you and your friends have in common?
17. Are there specific areas you feel you are more likely to be around Koreans and Korean Americans?
 - a. Examples?
 - b. How comfortable or uncomfortable do you feel around other Koreans or Korean Americans?
 - c. If there is mention of church: how did you decide to go to church there/be a part of that particular organization? Did you consider attending other churches/organizations?
 - i. Have you ever considered attending other churches/organizations with no or very few Korean Americans or Asian Americans?
18. What kinds of activities do you participate in with other Koreans and Korean Americans?

- a. Worded another way: Are there groups you are a member of or participate in that are characterized by Korean American identity?
- 19. How do you think being in the Midwest has affected your ethnic identity?
 - a. If it applies: Has college had an effect on your ethnic identity?
 - i. Friends? Organizations? Church? Bible studies?
 - ii. Have there been any other stages of life that have affected your ethnic identity?
- 20. Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?
- 21. As an adult, do you feel that you have experienced discrimination? Against what aspect of your identity? What about when you were growing up?
 - a. Have you experienced blatant things like, “Your English is so good” or “where are you really from?” meaning your ethnicity, those types of occurrences?
- 22. Have you ever been told you were whitewashed or Americanized? What did that mean to you? Or the opposite, a FOB? What did that mean to you? How did you respond when you were called these things?

Religious and ethnic identity

- 23. How do you identify religiously?
 - a. How did you become a Christian (your testimony)? When?
 - b. Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to identify religiously as you do today?
 - c. What denomination do you most identify with currently?
- 24. What kind of church did you attend growing up?
 - d. What was the ethnic and/or racial make-up of the congregation or ministry you were a part of?
 - e. How did you or your family decide to attend that church? Why?
 - i. To determine whether ethnic background was a major factor or not: Why do you think ethnic background was (not) important in making this decision?
 - 1. Were there other options for ethnic churches in the area?
- 25. What kind of church or religious group are you a part of currently?
 - f. What is the ethnic and/or racial make-up of these organizations?
 - g. Why did you choose to participate in these organizations/churches?
 - i. How did you make that decision?
 - ii. What kinds of things did you have to consider when thinking about which groups/church to participate in or be a member of?
 - h. If attending a Korean church or a homogenous church: how would you feel attending a religious organization/group that is made up of a different ethnic/racial demographic than you are currently in?
- 26. If it applies: Has college had an effect on your religious identity?
 - i. Friends? Organizations? Church? Bible studies?
 - ii. Have there been any other stages of life that have affected your religious identity?
- 27. Has there been a time when you converted from one religion to another?
 - iii. Could you tell me about those experiences?

- i. Has there ever been a time when it was difficult for you to identify as a Christian?
 - i. If they don't share willingly: What do you think led to those doubts or confusion?
 - ii. If they have overcome the difficulty: How did you overcome this difficult time?
- 28. Were there ever difficulties you faced in terms of faith or religious identity? Could you share some of those experiences with me?
 - j. How do these experiences shape who you are today?
- 29. How important is religion to you?
 - k. How important is your religion or faith to you?
 - l. Is your ethnic identity or religion/faith more important to you? How do you determine that?
 - i. If they do not share: do you have any explicit examples that exemplify this decision-making process?
- 30. In what ways do you practice your religion?
 - m. How often do you engage in the following: prayer, bible study, bible reading, prayer meetings, worship service attendance, fellowship with other Christians, serve in the church or a ministry, etc.?
- 31. Could you tell me a little bit about the role of religion in your family's immigration history?
 - n. If it is not mentioned: could you explain your parents' religions as well, from your perspective, how they became Christian (if that applies)? What is their role in the church today? How seriously do they take their religion?
- 32. Do you think being in the Midwest has affected how you religiously identify?
- 33. In what ways do your ethnic and religious identities overlap or connect?
 - a. Do you see your ethnic identity as being separate from your religious identity?
 - b. Is your ethnic or religious identity stronger for you?
 - i. For example: would you rather have all your friends be Korean Americans, but they don't share your faith OR that all your friends shared your faith, but none were Korean American?
 - ii. How did you come to feel this way?
 - 1. Was there a time when this wasn't true for you?
 - iii. What are some of the factors you considered in answering this question?
 - iv. Is this question difficult to answer for you? Why or why not?
- 2. On a scale of 1-5, 5 being most important, how important would you say your
 - a. Ethnic identity is to you?
 - b. Racial identity?
 - c. Religious identity?
 - d. Family values?
 - e. Midwestern identity?

Is there anything else you didn't get to share with me that you would like to further explain?

Is there anyone else that you could recommend to me to interview?