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Exploring U.S. imperialist influences on bicultural koreans' identity negotiation: a critical theory study

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Exploring U.S. Imperialist Influences on Bicultural Koreans’ Identity Negotiation:

A Critical Theory Study

by

Minsun Lee

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Abstract

Bicultural identity has traditionally been studied in a contextual vacuum, with little attention to how asymmetrical power dynamics between two cultures influence the negotiation of a bicultural identity. This critical theory study used a focus group and follow-up individual interviews to illuminate how five adult bicultural Koreans residing in the U.S. negotiate their sociocultural identities within the context of U.S. imperialist influences. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008) and methods drawn from feminist research (Anderson & Jack, 1991) were employed to analyze the data.

The analysis of the focus group and individual interviews suggested that participants were influenced by their experiences of immigration, racialization, racism, and racial triangulation in the U.S. Moreover, participants’ accounts manifested hegemonic ideologies of color-blindness and individualism, and revealed a mixture of false consciousness and critical consciousness about racism within the U.S. That is, colorblind ideology and individualistic ideology appeared to obscure the role of racialization and racism, resulting in a false consciousness. At the same time, participants also manifested a critical understanding of history and the call for sociopolitical activism. Additionally, participants’ narratives revealed internalized beliefs about the superiority of the U.S. versus the inferiority of Korea. Although most participants explicitly denied the impact of these factors on their bicultural identity, they implicitly acknowledged ways in which the asymmetrical power dynamics between the U.S. and Korea on the global stage, and between White Americans and ethnic Koreans within the U.S., influence their negotiation of sociocultural identities.
The present findings have theoretical and practical implications for understanding and working with bicultural Koreans within the U.S. First, identity theory and clinical practice associated with bicultural Koreans needs to attend to the experiences of loss of power, racism, and assimilation. Second, it is important to attend to the role of ideologies in bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation. Third, there needs to be a focus on the influence of false consciousness in bicultural Koreans’ identities. Finally, because bicultural Koreans’ internalization of the inferiority of Korean culture appears to influence their identities as Korean and American, this internalization should be attended to theorizing about and counseling with bicultural Koreans.
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Chapter One

Statement of the Problem

Cultural psychologists conceptualize biculturalism as involving the internalization of two cultures or the alternation, fusion, or integration of two cultural frames (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2007; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). In line with these differing conceptualizations, biculturalism has been studied using various frameworks, including competence (LaFromboise et al., 1993), cultural frame switching (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002), and ethnic identity (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997).

The psychological literature on biculturalism, although illuminating, has to date failed to address the influences of larger, political and cultural power dynamics, such as colonialism and imperialism, on an individual’s negotiation of two cultural identities. Although social identities, such as race and ethnicity, are intricately related to imperialist influences (Kim, 2008), psychologists have largely ignored the impact of historical and ideological forces on social and cultural identities (Okazaki, David, & Abelman, 2008). Inasmuch as psychology is “a study of social practices, which are inherently ideological and political” (Gee, 1992, p. xix), the lack of attention to power in the psychological literature on biculturalism is problematic. The present study was designed to fill this gap by understanding the influence of U.S. imperialism on bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation.

The historical and contemporary effects of colonialism has received some attention within the social sciences (e.g., Bulhan, 1985; David & Okazaki, 2006a; David & Okazaki, 2006b; Fanon, 1963; Hook, 2005; Martin-Baro, 1994; Okazaki, David, &
Abelman, 2008; Pieterse, Howitt & Naidoo, 2011). Within the literature on diversity, however, bicultural identity has been studied without attention to the specific political and cultural forces that can influence the process of identity construction and negotiation. The fact that biculturalism cannot be de-contextualized becomes even more apparent when one considers that biculturalism rarely involves two cultures of equal power. Moreover, the processes that comprise biculturalism, such as frame-switching, i.e., the shifting of cultural frames depending on the contextual cues (Hong, Morris, Chiu, Benet-Martinez, 2000), and use of role repertoire, i.e., a person’s range of culturally appropriate behaviors, (LaFrombiose et al., 1993), are likely complicated by the power disparity between the individual’s two cultures. Biculturalism is influenced by cultural power disparity because asymmetrical power dynamics can potentially create greater conflicts, both inter- and intrapersonally, for the bicultural individual. It was reasoned that these difficulties, in turn, likely influence the identities of bicultural people.

Cultural power disparity often involves a dynamic in which one culture is at the center and the other culture is at the margins, both within the specific site at which bicultural identity negotiation occurs (e.g., the U.S.) and in the larger context of the global stage. The marginalization of a particular ethnic cultural group within a majority culture is heavily influenced by the history of racialization within the more dominant society (Harrison, 1995). According to Bhatia and Ram (2001), individuals are identified by the markers of race and status in any new culture, both by others and within themselves. Further, due to the racialized history of the U.S., the legacies of oppression of many immigrant groups are handed down through generations, influencing the acculturation of these groups (Bhatia & Ram, 2001).
The marginalization of an ethnic cultural group within a particular nation, such as the U.S., is intricately related to the power dynamics between the host country and the country of origin of the ethnic group on the global stage, e.g., the relations between Korea and the U.S. The relationship between local marginalization and global power dynamics can be seen within the framework of imperialism (Sharpe, 1995).

Said (1993) defined imperialism as “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” (p. 9). Said also emphasized that imperialism is supported by an ideology of other peoples or races as inferior and subordinate. Other definitions of imperialism include “a dominance relation between collectivities, particularly between nations” (Galtung, 1971, p.81) as well as “the direct penetration of U.S. capital into foreign social formations, which induces the restructuring of economic, political, and ideological relationships within those nation-states and their subordinate articulation with a new American superstate” (Barrow, 2005, p. 125). Based on these writings, imperialism, in the present study, was defined as an asymmetrical power dynamic, in which one country exerts political, economic, military, and cultural dominion over another, a dynamic which also influences the structural and cultural oppression of an ethnic group within a nation.

Smith (1999) identified the many layers of European imperialism: (a) economic expansion, in which imperialism allowed Europeans to secure global markets; (b) the subjugation of “others,” i.e., the direct and indirect oppression of indigenous people in the interests of the colonizer; (c) the ideology of Enlightenment, which ushered in the ideas of the “modern” self and the modern state, which included “discovering” and controlling new worlds; (d) a discursive field of knowledge, i.e., post-colonial discourse
about colonization and decolonization. As the European empires, e.g., British and French, declined in power, the U.S. rose as a new superpower (Said, 1993). Using the rhetoric of American exceptionalism, moral responsibility, and the fight for freedom, along with the dual weapons of military domination and international media presence, the U.S. established itself as the new empire (Said, 1993). Yet, as Said noted, “so influential has been the discourse insisting on American specialness, altruism, and opportunity that ‘imperialism’ as a word or ideology has turned up only rarely and recently in accounts of United States culture, politics, history” (p. 8).

Race plays a critical role in U.S. imperialism. Racism, “characterized by an international hierarchy in which wealth, power, and advanced development are associated largely with whiteness [sic] or ‘honorary whiteness’” (Harrison, 1995, p. 50), allows for the subordination of people of color by White colonizers. Thus, imperialism is based on a hierarchy of race, in which Whiteness is placed at the top of the hierarchy.

U.S.-Korea relations and the marginalization of Koreans as a cultural and ethnic group within the U.S. can be seen within the context of U.S. imperialism. U.S. domination of Korea overseas, which is based on American expansion and a racial hierarchy, provides the basis for the marginalization of Koreans within the U.S. The historic and current influences of U.S. imperialism on Korea are apparent in the arbitrary division of Korea into North and South by the U.S. and Soviet Union, the subsequent and continued U.S. military presence in South Korea, and policies such as the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), in which the U.S. was granted the use of any Korean land for military operations, at no cost.

As yet, psychologists have failed to study how the larger force of imperialism on
the global and local stage (i.e., outside and within the U.S.) influences the identity negotiation of bicultural individuals. In a qualitative study, Kim (2008), a sociologist, showed that U.S. imperialism influences Koreans, both in Korea and the U.S., not only in their understanding of racial hierarchies and their identities as racialized beings, but also in their experiences of themselves and of their culture as inferior to the U.S. Inasmuch as individuals negotiate and choose their identities within the constraints of the systems to which they belong (Scherrer, 2001), it is reasonable to assume that bicultural individuals must contend with imperialist influences that constrain their experiences of themselves, and consequently, their identity negotiation.

The present qualitative study addressed the influence of imperialism on the process of bicultural identity negotiation. The objective of the study was to apply a critical theory lens to explore how bicultural Koreans residing in the U.S. negotiate their sociocultural identities within the context of U.S. imperialist influences.

**Research Questions and Paradigm**

The aim of this study was to examine the influence of U.S. imperialism on the identity negotiation of a group of adult bicultural Koreans residing in the U.S. The following research questions framed the study: (a) How does U.S. imperialism affect a group of adult bicultural Koreans’ negotiation of their sociocultural identities? (b) How do these adult bicultural Koreans’ experiences of their various sociocultural identities in turn influence their negotiation of a bicultural identity?

Inasmuch as research is not conducted in a vacuum, but rather is embedded in a specific ontological and epistemological framework (Creswell, 2007), it is important to be explicit, at the outset, about the paradigm that frames a research investigation. The
present study was designed to shift the paradigm that has framed most cultural psychological research. Accordingly, this study adopted a critical paradigm.

Critical theory focuses on the presence of power in all human endeavors (Prilleltensky, 2008). As Prilleltensky pointed out, psychologists are not value-neutral despite claims of objectivity; such claims are political acts that use social power to define a position. Thus, the present study used the power accorded to psychological research in order to illuminate how power affects people with marginalized identities. Because power suffuses all human endeavors, a central assumption in the study was that social and political power affects the identity negotiation process of bicultural individuals. That is, it was assumed that U.S. imperialism plays a role in the identity negotiation of bicultural Koreans. Consistent with critical theory, the present study sought to raise the participants’ awareness of this role while exploring the specific ways in which U.S. imperialism influences participants’ identity.

Critical epistemology “contests notions of objectivity and neutrality” and instead, adopts the stance that all knowledge and modes of inquiry are “moral and political” (Denzin, 2005, p. 936). As such, the validity of the findings of this critical theory study lies not in their “accuracy” but rather in their elucidation of the impact of sociopolitical influences on people’s lives (Prilleltensky, 2008).

Critical theory is integrally related to the goal of the present research endeavor. Liberation “from objective oppressors such as colonizers and exploitive employers, and liberation from subjective forces such as mass culture and ideology” is a central theme in critical theory (Davidson et al., 2006, p. 36). As such, a critical inquiry must also have social change as its goal. Because this study focused on U.S. imperialist influences on
bicultural identity negotiation, adopting a critical paradigm meant that one goal of the study was to change either the imperialist influence or the effects of such dynamics on the identity negotiation process. It was anticipated that the process of dialoguing with the participants would facilitate their awareness of U.S. imperialist influences on their identities, and thereby create conditions in which resistance to these influences can begin to take shape. Moreover, it was anticipated that I, as the individual conducting this investigation, would also be influenced by my communion with and understanding of participants’ lived experiences of persevering under U.S. imperialist influences in negotiating their identities, which in turn, would shape my own negotiation of identities.

Significance of the Study

Koreans are one of the fastest growing Asian immigrants and the seventh largest among the foreign-born immigrant groups in the U.S. (Terrazas, 2009). However, the experiences of Korean immigrants in general, and bicultural Koreans in particular, have yet to be studied in depth.

The research on biculturalism has also been limited in its focus. Although a bicultural identity has been associated with better psychological outcomes (e.g., Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001), the specific process whereby people develop a bicultural identity is not well understood. Further, the ways in which bicultural identity is shaped by larger sociohistorical forces have been virtually ignored.

By definition, bicultural Koreans who reside in the U.S. are familiar with both cultures, and likely have lived in both countries. Because of Korea’s history of U.S. military and economic presence, these Koreans are likely to have been exposed to the U.S. culture before entering the country. Despite its long history of collectivistic and
interdependent values, most Koreans have also been exposed to the more individualistic and independent value system of the U.S. through the media, including American Forces Korean Network (AFKN). Moreover, the presence of U.S. armed forces has exposed Koreans to the political and military might of the U.S (Kim, 2008). According to one study by the Korean ministry of justice (Korea International War Crimes Tribunal, 2001), for example, among the 39,452 crimes committed in Korea by the U.S. armed forces between 1967 and 1987, Korea was able to exercise its jurisdiction in only 234 of the cases due to the limitations imposed by the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).

The context of U.S. imperialism, then, primes Koreans to view Americans and the U.S. as a powerful country, with potentially negative implications for their perceptions of Korea and themselves as Koreans. Due to U.S. imperialist influences, although Korea and the U.S. are officially allies, Koreans’ relationship with the U.S. has been complicated. Among the younger generation of Koreans, many hold anti-U.S. sentiments, especially since the Gwangju massacre of 1980, for which the U.S. military was credited with implicit responsibility (Shin, 2006). Moreover, the U.S. imperialist presence in Korea also primes Koreans toward the racial hierarchy that exists in the U.S. (Kim, 2008).

Living in the U.S., Koreans likely experience discrimination and marginalization, which can further their perceptions of cultural inferiority and perpetuate the racial hierarchy that they are likely to have already internalized before entering the U.S. (Kim, 2008). For bicultural Koreans, who wish to maintain ties to their culture of origin while also carving out an identity as an American, their relationships to the U.S. and Americans before and after entering the U.S. likely complicates their process of identity negotiation.

Given Korea’s unique history and relationship with U.S. imperialism, Koreans’
bicultural identity cannot be studied in a vacuum; it is important to attend to the larger
sociohistorical force of imperialism. The present study sought to contextualize the
experiences of bicultural Koreans, especially focusing on the influence of U.S.
imperialism on bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation, thereby contributing to a deeper
theoretical understanding of this population. It was also hoped that use of a critical frame
to understand bicultural Koreans’ experiences would contribute to the establishment of a
more empowering paradigm for research on this community. Moreover, an
understanding of the influence of U.S. imperialism on bicultural Koreans’ experiences
was expected to provide a frame for working with individuals from this community
within psychotherapeutic settings, in which identity often emerges as a significant theme.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

The following sections begin with a review of the literature on bicultural identity, then present a brief history of U.S. imperialism in order to contextualize the literature on Korean individuals’ cultural, ethnic, and racial identities. Next, the constructs of culture, ethnonationality, race, color-blind ideology, false consciousness, and critical consciousness will be defined and discussed within the context of U.S. imperialist influence on Koreans. Finally, the literature on identity negotiation will be reviewed.

Bicultural Identity

Bicultural identity involves an identification with two ethnic cultures (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002). Within the literature on bicultural identity, the concept of bicultural identity integration (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002) has gained much traction because it allows for an understanding of variations in an individual’s experience of bicultural identity. Bicultural identity integration refers to the degree to which individuals perceive their two cultures as compatible or oppositional (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002). Theoretically, individuals with high bicultural identity integration tend to view the two identities as compatible, whereas individuals with low bicultural identity integration view their two identities as oppositional. The latter individuals are said to experience difficulty in combining the two cultures into a cohesive identity (Haritatos & Benet-Martinez, 2002).

Bicultural identity integration has been shown to interact with cultural frame switching, which refers to orienting to a cultural frame depending on contextual cues (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Hong et al., 2000). In Benet-Martinez et al.’s (2002) study,
bicultural Chinese American participants were given either an American visual prime, such as Mickey Mouse or the Statue of Liberty, or a Chinese visual prime, such as a Chinese dragon or the Great Wall of China. Next, participants were shown a picture of a single fish swimming in front of a group of fish. Participants with high bicultural identity integration, as measured by an author-developed scale, interpreted the single fish in line with the prime. That is, participants attributed the single fish in front of the pack to an internal quality, such as leadership, if they had received the American prime. On the other hand, the fish’s behavior was attributed to an external quality (e.g., being chased by the other fish) if participants had received the Chinese prime. Participants who reported low bicultural identity integration, on the other hand, interpreted the fish’s behavior in a way that was in opposition to the prime. That is, individuals with high bicultural identity integration switched their perceptions according to cultural context in the expected direction, whereas those with low bicultural identity integration alternated their perception in opposition to the cultural context.

Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) theorized that bicultural identity integration is related to cultural distance, or the perceived lack of overlap and dissociation between the two cultures, and cultural conflict, i.e., the perceived clash between the two cultures. According to these authors, cultural distance is either motivationally or perceptually driven, whereas cultural conflict tends to be experienced affectively. That is, cultural distance may be used as a compartmentalization strategy to allow a person to maintain equal ties to both cultures. Alternatively, cultural distance refers to the degree of difference between the culture of origin and the majority culture. An individual’s perception of cultural distance appears to decrease the longer he or she stays in the host
culture (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). Cultural conflict, on the other hand, has been associated with internal and interpersonal factors, such as high neuroticism and discrimination experience (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). When an individual who identifies with two cultures experiences prejudice or disapproval from both cultures, he or she may experience cultural conflict. The experience of cultural conflict also seems to be related to confusions regarding one’s identity (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005).

Benet-Martinez et al.’s (2002) model of bicultural identity integration provides an understanding of individuals’ experiences of cultural frame-switching. However, the model has failed to locate the identity integration process within the specific sociohistorical context that shapes a person’s cultural understanding and identity experiences. The ways in which a bicultural person’s specific experiences with oppression, racialized hierarchy, ethnonationality, and imperialism influence identity negotiation cannot be understood simply within the framework of the bicultural identity integration model. Moreover, the implicit assumption that high identity integration is the more desirable state does not take into account the multiplicity of factors that influence a person’s ability to integrate two cultural identities. For example, the relationship of cultural distance and cultural conflict with critical consciousness remains to be examined. Critical consciousness, however, can be seen as crucial to navigating the oppressive terrain of bicultural experience, given that a critical reflection on oppressive social conditions can allow a person to act to change those conditions (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011).

Although having a high bicultural identity integration may be related to greater psychological well-being, it may also have greater unseen costs, such as more
assimilation of the host culture’s hegemonic ideology. Indeed, in a mixed-methods study of bicultural adolescents (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997), Mexican American adolescents who were classified as blended biculturals, i.e., theoretically more integrated in terms of identity, reported a significantly stronger American identity.

Chao and Hong (2007) theorized that biculturalism involves individuals’ active construction of their social experiences at individual, intermediate and intergroup levels. At the individual level, bicultural individuals flexibly switch between two cultural frames depending on contextual cues and applicability. At the intergroup level, groups are theorized to be influenced by group stereotypes. Interestingly, Chao and Hong asserted that, at the intermediate level, bicultural individuals’ lay beliefs about social boundaries as well as their intercultural goals influence their negotiation of cultures. That is, people who have an essentialist belief about race (i.e., the belief that race is a biological essence that is immutable and indicative of abilities/traits) are more likely to have difficulty switching between two cultural frames. Additionally, according to Chao and Hong, bicultural individuals whose goal in intercultural context is to defend their culture from foreign contamination tend to make clear differentiations between their two cultures, whereas individuals whose goal is to learn from other cultures tend to be more innovative in their problem solving.

Chao and Hong (2007) implicitly endorsed a “creative” combining of two cultures, e.g., Chinese and American cultures, by adopting a “learning goal” (p. 148). However, these authors failed to account for the fact that combined cultural symbols are often not a neutral product of globalization, but rather are products of imperialist capitalist endeavors. That is, U.S. corporations often use indigenous cultural symbols to simulate customized
marketing, which may be no more than a façade. Thus, the “defense goal” may not necessarily be related to simply essentializing the two cultures (i.e., the perception of cultures as rigid, immutable entities), as the authors argued, but instead linked to a critical consciousness about cultural appropriation and invasion. The need to defend one’s culture may be an especially salient aspect for bicultural Koreans who are aware of imperialist influences on their identity negotiation.

In summary, the extant literature on bicultural identity appears to endorse fluidly combining the two cultures in which bicultural individuals participate, without attention to how this negotiation process can be complicated by the power dynamic between the two cultures. This gap in the literature underscores the importance of attending to contextual factors that potentially influence bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation. In particular, U.S. imperialistic influences may play an important role in bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation

**History of U.S. Imperialism in Korea**

Although a comprehensive history of U.S. imperialism is beyond the scope of this chapter, a brief overview of U.S. imperialist influences on Korea is relevant as a contextual frame for understanding bicultural Koreans’ experiences. Because bicultural Koreans must navigate not only the two cultures of Korea and the U.S. but also the imperialist relationship that exists between these two nations, an understanding of the impact of U.S. imperialism on Korea forms the basis for understanding bicultural Koreans’ experiences.

As Chang (2002b) pointed out, South Korea’s history of military, political, and economic occupation by the U.S. has continued for over 60 years since the end of
Japanese colonial rule. Y. Kim (1995) argued that American policies toward Korea post-liberation from Japan were pointedly different from those toward Japan; Y. Kim attributed this difference to the lower status of Korea in comparison to Japan. According to this author, President Roosevelt, who led the allies’ construction of policies toward Korea, initially asserted the need for a 50-year international trusteeship of the country. Y. Kim asserted that denying Korea its sovereignty was driven by Americans’ fear of Korea falling under Soviet domination.

Chang (2002b) argued that the basic objectives of American policies post-World War II were to maintain a worldwide capitalist economy, reorganize global politics towards a U.S.-centered one, stem the tide of communism, and oppress nationalist liberation movements that went against these other agendas. In this context, the U.S. reorganized all structures within South Korea, including the government, the police, the army, and the judicial and legislative branches (Chang, 2002b). Within the government, the U.S. strengthened the role of the central government and filled important seats with conservative Koreans who had been party to Japanese colonial rule (Chang, 2002b). Further, per the advisement of the American military command, the same members of the police force who had been complicit in Japanese rule were reinstated post-liberation. Similarly, within the legislative and judicial branches, many individuals who had been party to Japanese rule maintained their positions. Additionally, amidst rising tensions between Koreans and American occupiers, the U.S. began training the Korean army in order to suppress civilian unrest as well as to defend against threats from the Soviet Union (Chang, 2002b).

American imperialist influence over Korea did not end in the immediate aftermath
of WWII and Korea’s liberation from Japan. Rather, American influence continued over
the various governments since that of Rhee Seungman, the first South Korean President,
who was strongly backed politically and financially by the U.S. (Yoo, 2002). Rhee
Seungman’s government was criticized not only for his dictatorship but also because of
his policies, which were backed by the American military presence and which continued
to reward those who had been complicit in Japanese colonial government (Chang, 2002b).

American influence is felt militarily, economically, and in Korea’s educational
policies. Militarily, American influence is even more salient, evident in the fact that
Korea’s wartime military strategic control remains to this day in the hands of American
military strategists (Paek, 2002). Economically, South Korea was forced to a shift into
neoliberalist policies (i.e., economic policies that emphasize the free market, deregulation,
and privatization), without the necessary infrastructure to deal with the open international
market; this shift in policies led to a Korean economy that was further subordinated to
economically more powerful countries, most notably the U.S. (Chang, 2002a).

Imperialist influences can also be seen in South Korea’s educational philosophy, which
serves to reproduce the ideological basis of a country and its government. That is, South
Korea’s educational philosophy since its liberation from Japan has been based in
pragmatism, a philosophy that was directly imported from the U.S. (Chung, 2002).

The impact of U.S. imperialism in all areas of life is such that “the subjugated
must navigate a world in which they are constantly reminded of their inferiority” (Kim,
2008, p. 45). This impact is partly related to the fact that “globalization” has many faces,
i.e., military occupation as well as corporate expansion and media propagation (Stewart-
Harawira, 2005). That is, with the imposition of western cultural values through
globalized mass culture, a U.S.-centered global economy, and the continued U.S. military presence within Korea, the racialized construct of Whiteness has become associated with cultural and economic superiority. Without active resistance, it is possible for Koreans to internalize the belief that they are racially, nationally, and culturally inferior in view of the racial hierarchy that exists in the U.S. and that has been exported through various vehicles including mass media and political ideology (Kim, 2008). Thus, U.S. imperialism is likely to influence not only Koreans’ understanding of how Korea is positioned on the global stage, which in turn influences their experiences of both Korean and American culture, but also their experiences of ethnonationality and of themselves as racialized beings. As such, bicultural Koreans’ experiences of themselves as cultural beings are invariably influenced by the historic and current U.S. imperialistic presence in Korea.

**Culture**

Culture has been defined variously as including “any and all potentially salient ethnographic, demographic, status, or affiliation variables” (Pedersen, 2005, p. 13), “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9), and “a socially transmitted or socially constructed constellation consisting of such things as practices, competencies, ideas, schemas, symbols, values, norms, institutions, goals, constitutive rules, artifacts, and modifications of the physical environment” (Fiske, 2002, p. 85). A consensus on a definition of culture remains elusive, perhaps because of the difficulty in delineating the boundaries and the characteristics that define a cultural group. For purposes of this study, culture was defined as a set of norms, values, and practices, which a group of people are
perceived (by others or by themselves) to share as a function of belonging to the group. This definition highlights the perception of shared norms and practices rather than reifying actual practices or values. The emphasis on perception is meant to underscore the socially constructed nature of cultures and the ways in which so-called cultural characteristics have been created within particular historic and social contexts.

Much has been made, within cross-cultural and cultural psychology, of the differences between eastern and western cultures. Triandis (2000), for example, described various dimensions, or cultural syndromes, in which cultures differ from one another. Most East Asian cultures are considered collectivistic, tight, vertical, and expressive compared to Western cultures, which tend to be individualistic, loose, horizontal, and instrumental (Triandis, 2000). Markus and Kitayama (1991), on the other hand, focused not on the dimensions in which the east and west differ, but on the ways in which the same phenomenon is constructed in different cultures. For example, Markus and Kitayama argued that individualistic and collectivistic cultures do not differ so much in whether importance is accorded to the self versus the group but rather in the ways that self and relationships with others are interpreted. Oyserman, Koon, and Kemmelmeier’s (2002) meta-analytic study showed that the individualism-collectivism differences across cultures were not as pronounced as might be expected; for example, Americans are higher in individualism but no lower on collectivism than Japanese or Koreans.

Although a cross-cultural framework is valuable, it may be overly simplistic. Who has the power to define certain cultures must also be taken into account. It is not only etic cultural psychologists who may be enforcing the east-west binary. Gjerde and Onishi (2000), for example, critiqued the idea of the Japanese interdependent self,
pointing out ways in which Japanese corporations have historically used the company-as-family metaphor to enforce employees’ total commitment to the company. Thus, a supposed cultural characteristic may be a hegemonic construct used for corporate profit. However, the ways in which ostensible cultural norms are resisted or practiced by individuals in daily life are ignored in the service of delineating homogenizing cultural constructs (Gjerde & Onishi, 2000).

What is also problematic is the extent to which eastern and western cultures can be defined in opposition to each other, when colonialism and so-called “globalization” have simultaneously served to reinforce the binary opposition of these cultures and break down the distinctions through the imposition of western values. The collectivistic/individualistic binary is itself an interactive product born out of discourse with “hegemonic Western ideas/ideologies” (Okazaki et al., 2008, p. 95). As Okazaki et al. pointed out, in the context of postcolonialism, it is difficult to identify what is authentically cultural for the colonized. That is, much of what is quintessentially eastern has been constructed as a counterpoint to threats of western invasion.

At the same time, globalization has effected undeniable changes in the fabric of many eastern countries. Yi (2002) reviewed the numerous changes that Korea has undergone in recent years due to so-called globalization. In the workplace, for example, a system of annual pay increase was changed to salary increases based on merit, which created a more competitive and less familial corporate atmosphere. In the area of consumption, western style goods replaced much of traditional Korean products in daily consumption, from cheese to peanut butter to vitamins (Yi, 2002). However, nothing is as representative of the globalization influence as the pre-eminence placed in Korea on
the English language. As Yi pointed out, “English is not only a basic survival skill but also a key to sell commodities or brand images in the world” (p. 30).

As seen in the above discussion, culture is often used synonymously with nationality. Although the two are distinct constructs, most Koreans and Americans see themselves as belonging to two distinct cultures as a function of their differing national origins. As such, the term culture, in the context of this paper, is often used to refer to a set of perceived norms, values, and practices as a function of nationality.

A quintessentially Korean or American culture, however, cannot be delineated without essentializing or homogenizing these cultures. Rather, it is important to attend to the ways in which cultures have been historically constructed and the impact of these constructions on individual and cultural identities. In this study, it was assumed that bicultural Koreans’ understanding of Korean and American cultures is influenced by their understanding of the relationship between these cultures, which, in turn, influences the negotiation of their bicultural identity.

**Ethnonationality and Ethnicity**

Another construct that eludes exact definition but influences individuals’ cultural identities is ethnicity. This term is often used interchangeably with race and culture (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Betancourt and Lopez emphasized the interactive relationship between ethnicity and culture, arguing that ethnic affiliation can determine a culture as much as cultural similarity can define an ethnic group. Carter (1995) asserted that an ethnic group is distinguished by national origin or religious affiliation, and Cokely (2007) emphasized “common ancestry, shared history, shared traditions, and shared cultural traits” (p. 225) as the basis for ethnic categorization.
Ethnicity is important in understanding bicultural Koreans’ experiences of identity negotiation because ethnic identity is a part of cultural identity. In Korea, ethnicity, or more accurately, ethnonationality has historically been an affectively important and binding concept for Koreans (Kim, 2008). Shin (2006) argued that Korean nationalism, based on a sense of ethnic homogeneity, is the product of various historical forces. According to Shin, Korea looked to pan-Asianism and nationalism as a means to counter the encroachment of the west at the end of the nineteenth century. For what Shin called the pan-Asianists, the western-imported Social Darwinist philosophy of survival of the fittest had to be fought by racializing the battle. Thus, pan-Asianists viewed the alliance among China, Japan, and Korea as integral to their survival. On the other hand, Korean nationalists viewed the Japanese as having as many imperialist ambitions as the west, so that they perceived the nation to be the unit of survival.

Since the end of Japanese colonial rule, nationalism has been a driving force in Korea’s postcolonial resistance (Pai, 2000). According to Pai, Korean nationalist historians have spearheaded the now widely-accepted notion in Korea that the country’s origins can be traced to pre-historic times, with the beginning of the “pure Korean race” (p. 2). Pai argued that “since time immemorial,” Koreans’ postcolonial project has been to instill in Koreans “a collective sense of destiny as victims of superpower politics and foreign invasions,” including those of China, Japan, and the West (p. 2).

Thus, for Koreans, ethnic affiliation has been historically tied to nationalism, race, and colonial influence from both the east and the west. As such, ethnonationalism has had a profound impact on Koreans’ identity as cultural and racial beings, simultaneously as a source of pride that counters a White-centered racialized hierarchy
and as a means of perpetuating racialized discourse (Kim, 2008).

For Koreans living in the U.S., the need for a strong sense of ethnic affiliation may be highlighted by racial discrimination as well as by the Asian American racial identity that is either forced on or chosen by them. That is, the racialization, or “the creation and characterization of racial categories” (C. J. Kim, 1999, p. 105), of Koreans within the U.S. underscores the need for Koreans to carve out a distinct identity in addition to or beyond their racial identity, in reaction to the exclusion they are likely to experience from mainstream American culture. As Markus (2010) pointed out, racial grouping “draws attention to the difference in the power relationships among” groups, whereas ethnicity highlights the “differences in meanings, values, and ways of living” (p. 654). Thus, a strong ethnic identity can buffer racialization.

Research on whether ethnic identity serves as a buffer for Korean Americans, and more generally Asian Americans, in the face of discrimination, has been mixed (Lee, 2003, 2005; Mossakowski, 2003; Yoo & Lee, 2005, 2009). Lee (2003) reported that other-group orientation buffered the negative effects of minority group discrimination on community well-being for Asian American college students, but ethnic identity did not moderate the relationship between discrimination and psychological well-being. In a study of various factors that influence Filipino Americans’ depression, Mossakowski (2003) concluded that ethnic identity served as a buffer against the effects of lifetime racial/ethnic discrimination on depressive symptoms.

On the other hand, in a study on Korean Americans’ resilience in the face of discrimination, Lee (2005) found differential effects for specific components of ethnic identity on various aspects of well being. That is, for Korean Americans with relatively
more ethnic pride, more perceived discrimination predicted more depressive symptoms and lower social connectedness, whereas for participants with relatively less ethnic pride, depressive symptoms were high and social connectedness low regardless of the level of perceived discrimination. Ethnic identity clarity, on the other hand, did not significantly moderate the relationship between perceived discrimination and well being.

Yoo and Lee (2005) reported significant interaction between perceived discrimination, ethnic identity, and approach-type coping strategies (e.g., cognitive restructuring and problem solving) on Asian Americans’ well-being. However, higher ethnic identity and more frequent use of cognitive restructuring and problem solving coping strategies seemed to buffer the effects of discrimination only when participants perceived little discrimination.

Finally, Yoo and Lee (2009), using vignettes of single and multiple racial discrimination incidents, found that ethnic identity moderated the effects of racial discrimination on positive affect. That is, Asian American participants who displayed stronger ethnic identity reported less positive affect when reading about multiple racial discrimination incidents than when reading about a single racial discrimination incident. By contrast, Asian American participants who reported a relatively weaker ethnic identity had more positive affect when reading about multiple racial discrimination incidents than when reading about a single racial discrimination incident.

Interestingly, in a study of the interaction of Asian Americans’ ethnic identity, discrimination experience, and age, Yip, Gee, and Takeuchi (2008) found that for Asian Americans in their 30s and over age 51, stronger ethnic identity exacerbated the effects of discrimination on distress. On the other hand, for Asian Americans in their 40s, ethnic
identity buffered the effects of discrimination on distress. However, the validity of this study was threatened by the use of a single item to assess ethnic identity.

Taken together, the literature on the role of ethnic identity in the relationship between discrimination and well-being is mixed. There is some evidence that ethnic identity moderates the effects of racism on well-being, but differential results across studies renders it difficult to draw conclusive statements. It seemed reasonable to conclude, however, that ethnic identity plays some role in Asian Americans’ meaning-making with regard to their racialized experiences. Inasmuch as bicultural Koreans in the U.S. likely have experiences of racialization in Korea as well as the U.S., it is also likely that making sense of their ethnic identity is an important part of negotiating their bicultural identity.

**Race and Racial Identity**

Race plays an important role in bicultural Koreans’ understanding of themselves because race is intricately related to Koreans’ experiences of their culture and to their self-definition. Moreover, the context of U.S. imperialism makes it impossible for bicultural Koreans to avoid experiences of racial hierarchy.

As Okazaki and colleagues (2008) argued, an analysis of colonialism (and by extension, imperialism) necessarily involves an examination of the ideology of race, because race is often used as the basis for one culture or group to dominate another. That is, certain groups are considered racially superior and thus are legitimized in their quest for dominance over groups that are seen as racially inferior.

Although the validity of race as a biologically-based construct has been rejected by the academic community (Smedley & Smedley, 2005), the legacy of racialization of
individuals and groups is far from over (Harrison, 1995). Contemporary racism takes on a more subtle form than an ideology of explicit racial superiority (e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002). Further, a racial hierarchy continues to exist today, with various postcolonial nations “reconfigure[ing] the Eurocentric racial imagination” (Harrison, 1995, p. 50).

Koreans have been primed to the idea of a racialized hierarchy by agrarian-based classist hierarchies of color (Kim, 2008). That is, Korea historically valued Whiteness/light skin because in an agrarian hierarchy, nobility was characterized by light skin, whereas the peasant class was characterized by tanned skin. This White/light valorization, along with the imperialist import of racist imagery in the media and mass culture, primes Koreans toward the racialized hierarchy of the U.S. (Kim, 2008). As such, the impact of racialization on Koreans’ identity must be examined within the context of imperialism.

The literature on racial identity has contributed to our understanding of how people of subordinated races experience themselves as racialized beings. Helms’s (1995) racial identity model, for example, describes how people of color move through five racial identity schemas: (a) conformity, in which a person minimizes the importance of race and looks to the White society for self-definition, (b) dissonance, in which a person experiences ambivalence or confusion about his or her racial identity, (c) immersion-emersion, which is marked by absorption into the culture-of-origin to the exclusion of White culture, (d) internalization, in which the person recognizes the strengths and limitations of his or her culture-of-origin as well as those of White culture, and (e) integrative awareness, in which the person constructs his or her own personal meaning
Azibo and Robinson (2004) criticized developmentally-based racial identity theories, like Helms’s (1995), by providing evidence that low identity statuses and high identity statuses based on these models are associated. These authors argued that there is an imperative for a race to extend itself for survival. Moreover, the authors critiqued extant racial identity models for placing Whiteness at the center. That is, developmental models view Whiteness as a central factor with which a person of color must struggle or integrate. As such, the internalization status, which Azibo and Robinson characterized as “I accept you, so please accept me” (p. 251) is not a natural denouement of Black racial identity development, but rather a regression. Azibo and Robinson argued that psychological Africanity development can only logically culminate in the “authentic struggler,” who continues to prioritize “the defense, development, and maintenance of African life and culture” (p. 252). It is possible that bicultural Koreans who maintain strong ties to their Korean identity within the context of racism also continue to prioritize their racial identity as Asians and resist integrating into mainstream White American culture.

Researchers have examined the development of racial identity as well as its impact on various other psychosocial factors, such as racism and psychological well-being. Miville, Constantine, Baysden, and So-Lloyd (2005), for example, in a phenomenological study, identified several themes in multiracial identity development: encounters with racism, reference group orientation, the “chameleon” experience (p. 512), and identity development in the context of critical people, places, and periods. Although some of these themes are unique to multiracial people, a few may be applicable to
bicultural individuals, who also, at times, feel caught between two worlds (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). For example, *encounters with (monoracial) racism* are experiences that most people of color, including bicultural Koreans, have in the U.S., and likely influence the development of their racial identity. *Reference group orientation*, i.e., the issue of which racial group serves as a reference group for the individual, is also likely to be experienced by bicultural Koreans, albeit to a lesser extent than by multiracial people. That is, because the phenotypic appearance of bicultural Koreans is likely more distinguishable and easily identifiable than for many multiracial people, there may be a more uniform external pressure to be oriented toward an Asian rather than toward a White American racial group. Moreover, given the racist experiences faced by many Asians in the U.S., many individuals also may be motivated to identify with other Asians to empower themselves. At the same time, bicultural Koreans may also experience conflicting orientations in their reference group, if they have internalized many of the values and norms that are considered typical of White, European American culture.

Several studies examined the relationship of racial identity to racism and well-being. Alvarez and Helms (2001), for example, investigated the psychological correlates of racial identity for Asian American college students. Racial identity was predictive of collective self esteem, such that conformity status was negatively associated with collective self-esteem, whereas immersion-emersion and integrative awareness were positively related to collective self-esteem. The authors also found that racial identity was predictive of public racial appraisal, such that the immersion-emersion status was related to the perception that Asian Americans were negatively viewed by others, whereas the integrative awareness status was related to the perception that Asian Americans were
viewed positively by others. Alvarez and Helms also found some support for the relationship between racial identity and awareness of racism. Interestingly, only immersion-emersion was positively related to an awareness of institutional and interpersonal racism, whereas dissonance and integrative awareness were negatively related to awareness of interpersonal racism. The latter finding provides some support for Azibo and Robinson’s (2004) assertion that the final stage in many racial identity development models constitutes a regression in racial awareness.

In another study based on a sample of Asian American undergraduate students, Alvarez, Juang, and Liang (2006) investigated whether racial identity mediates the relationship between racial socialization and awareness of racism. The results were mixed. Both dissonance and immersion-emersion partially mediated the relationship between racial socialization and perceptions of direct and collective racism, whereas only immersion-emersion partially mediated the relationship between racial socialization and perceptions of microaggressions. Like Alvarez and Helms’s (2001) findings, these results highlight the role of the immersion-emersion status in Asian Americans’ awareness of racism. Bicultural Koreans in the immersion-emersion status may be more likely to be aware of racism, and by extension, more likely to be aware of the impact of U.S. imperialism on their own identity development.

The racial identity of Asian Americans may not only influence their experiences with racism and imperialism, but may also affect their racialization experience in ways that differ from other groups of color. According to Yu (2001), Asians within the U.S. have historically been seen as both a racial “problem” and a racial “solution” (p. 7). Since the mid-nineteenth century, when the Chinese arrived in the U.S., Asians have been
considered a threat to White labor. At once exoticized and demonized, Asians were treated as non-American. Yu posited that since the 1960s, Asian Americans have also been treated as the solution because of their “model minority” status (p. 7). However, Yu emphasized that the model minority myth also depends on the exoticization of Asians because it highlights their non-American status.

In a series of studies, Devos and Heng (2009) examined the processes by which people equate the term *American* with *White*. In these studies, undergraduate students were presented with primes of either an Asian or White face with neutral expressions. Participants were subsequently presented with either an American or European landmark, immediately after which they were asked to classify the landmark as “American” or “foreign.” Results showed that participants were more likely to identify the landmarks as American when they were primed with a White face than with an Asian face.

C. J. Kim (1999) asserted that public discourse about race and the status of various racial groups construct a field in which different racial groups are positioned. In an effort to understand the specific racial experiences of Asian Americans, Kim proposed a model to explain Asian Americans’ racialized experiences within the U.S. Specifically, Kim argued that Asian Americans have been “racially triangulated” in relation to Whites and Blacks in the U.S. (p. 107). Delineating the dual axes of superior/inferior and insider/foreigner, Kim asserted that White Americans, who have the most power to define racial fields, position Asian Americans as superior to Black Americans in order to dominate both (but especially to dominate the latter), while also defining Asian Americans as foreign and unassimilable in order to exclude them from political and civic membership.
C. J. Kim (1999) further outlined the historical manifestations of the racial triangulation of Asian Americans. According to C. J. Kim, the mid-nineteenth century was characterized by open racial triangulation because White Americans needed cheap labor without the specter of another enslaved population nor the obligation to assimilate this labor force and pollute the “ideal of a pristine White polity” (p. 109). Since the civil rights movement of the mid-1960s, when color-blind ideology took root in the U.S., racial claims were made under the guise of culture (C. J. Kim, 1999). The racial triangulation of Asian Americans, now expressed in cultural terms, serves the same agenda of White supremacy. According to C. J. Kim, by valorizing Asian Americans for “succeeding” by virtue of their cultural values and behaviors, Whites are able to transform the conflict between Whites and people of color into a conflict among people of color without the charge of racism. Simultaneously, the ongoing and immutable status of Asian Americans as foreigners allows Whites to continue denying Asians full participation in the body politic.

For bicultural Koreans, who, while living in Korea, have experienced subordinate positioning along the superior/inferior axis by White Americans, and then experienced racial triangulation as both “model minority” and “perpetual foreigner” after settling in the U.S., making sense of their racialization experiences may be a significant part of the negotiation of their bicultural identity. That is, negotiating their position in the global racial field as well as the racial field within the U.S. may be part of the process of negotiating a bicultural identity.

**Color-Blind Ideology**

As part of the hegemonic ideology, color-blind ideology is likely to influence
bicultural Koreans’ views of themselves and others as racial beings. Before the civil rights movement, color-blindness was a vision for racial equality. However, the term was appropriated as a reactionary call by those who opposed the race-conscious measures that civil rights activists came to see as necessary for the achievement of equality (Lopez, 2007). Over time, awareness of or emphasis on racial group membership when making decisions came to be seen as discriminatory; this view was related to American democratic philosophy, that individuals should be judged based on their own merit and not as members of groups. Of course, this democratic ideology is actually a myth; throughout American history, there have been bitter struggles over who should be included in American citizenship (Foner, 2003).

In the post-civil-rights era, blatant and overt racism has been replaced by what is termed modern racism (McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981) or aversive racism (Kovel, 1970). While most Whites today do not endorse Jim Crow-like laws, they also still espouse implicit or subtle beliefs about people of color. Covert racism is more difficult to battle because the majority of White individuals do not see themselves as racist (Dovidio et al., 2002). In the absence of racists, racism becomes a historical artifact, perpetuated by “bad” Whites in the past and perhaps a few “racists” in the present (Leonardo, 2004).

In this context, color-blindness becomes an ideological tool for White individuals to affirm themselves and the society in which they live as non-racist. Color-blind ideology makes it easy to call for assimilation to the dominant, White values because it deemphasizes the differential experiences of race. Moreover, adopting the color-blind ideology becomes a means to maintain the self-image of a non-racist self, deny the privileges associated with Whiteness, and perpetuate the myth of meritocracy (DeCuir &
Dixson, 2004). This color-blind ideology stands side-by-side with a presumed cultural pluralism. Whereas a true cultural pluralism values the unique culture of each race and ethnicity, in actuality, Americans pretend to accept different cultures while power and privilege is held by the dominant, White culture (Rist, 1974).

Although numerous studies of color-blindness have been conducted, the samples tended to be predominantly White participants (e.g., Bukard & Knox, 2004; Gushue, 2004; Gushue & Constantine, 2007; Spanierman et al., 2008, Zou & Dickter, 2013). However, some studies have relevance for ethnic and racial minorities within the White majority culture. Chen et al. (2006), for example, conducted a cluster analysis of Asian Americans’ racial identity profiles using Helms and Carter’s (1990) People of Color Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (PCRIAS). The authors then examined differences in color-blind attitudes and racism-related stress across the various profiles. Results indicated that Asian Americans in the Dissonance and the Immersion clusters scored low on color-blind attitudes and high on racism-related stress, whereas Asian Americans in the Conformity cluster scored high on color-blind attitudes and low on racism-related stress. Surprisingly, Asian Americans in the Internalization cluster, which according to Helms’s (1995) theory represents a more integrated level of awareness of race, scored high on color-blind attitudes and low on racism-related stress. One potential explanation for this finding may be found in Azibo and Robinson’s (2004) criticism of the internalization status as a regression in racial identity development.

In another study that supported the relationship between racial identity and color-blind attitudes, Kohatsu, Victoria, Lau, Flores, and Salazar (2011) found that among university students of color, racial identity status was predictive of color-blindness. That
is, Conformity and Resistance statuses from the POCRIAS (Helms, 1995) were predictors of color-blind racial attitudes. Surprisingly, however, the authors found that color-blindness was not predictive of Anti-Asian attitudes.

Color-blind attitudes may also be predictive of beliefs about affirmative action. Oh et al. (2010) found that racial minority participants were more likely to support affirmative action than their White counterparts. Moreover, the authors found that lower levels of color-blind attitudes were predictive of greater support for affirmative action policies in higher education and that the predictive relationship between color-blindness and positive affirmative action beliefs was stronger than the relationship between racial group membership and positive affirmative action beliefs.

Tynes and Markoe (2010) studied individuals’ reactions to racial discrimination on social network sites and found that European Americans tended to be less bothered by racial discrimination on social network sites than African Americans. Further, lower color-blind attitudes were related to greater distress at racial bias on social network sites.

Neville, Coleman, Falconer, and Holmes (2005) showed that African Americans who endorse a higher degree of color-blindness tend to exhibit (a) greater blame of African Americans for economic and social disparities, (b) a belief in a hierarchical social system supported by superior and inferior groups, and (c) internalized oppression in the form of racist stereotypes about African Americans. Although this study was conducted with African Americans, it is possible that a similar relationship exists for Asian Americans between color-blindness and other beliefs that support their own oppression.

Taken together, research with people of color suggests that color-blindness may be an important factor related to racial identity, reactions to racism, and attitudes toward
social policies around race. Moreover, color-blind ideology may be related to internalization of oppressive beliefs. As such, bicultural Koreans who endorse a color-blind attitude are likely to have internalized beliefs about the inferiority of their race, culture, or ethnicity, which may complicate how they manage their bicultural identity.

**False Consciousness**

Color-blindness among members of racial minority groups can be thought of as a form of *false consciousness*, a Marxian concept that denotes the beliefs held by the subordinate group in society, which serves to perpetuate the hegemonic ideology (Jost, 1995). Jost identified six different types of false consciousness: (a) fatalism or resignation to the status quo; (b) the false identification of blame or what might be called blaming the victim; (c) failure to perceive injustice and disadvantage; (d) justification of social roles and statuses; (e) identification with the oppressor; and (f) resistance to change. The production of false consciousness involves system-justification, i.e., the “psychological process whereby an individual perceives, understands, and explains an existing situation or arrangement with the result that the situation or arrangement is maintained” (Jost & Banaji, 1994, p. 10). System justification and false consciousness are largely maintained unconsciously (Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002).

Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, and Sullivan (2003) proposed three conditions under which disadvantaged groups are more likely to endorse system-justifying beliefs. These include (a) when identification with one’s group is low, or when the salience of one’s membership in a subordinated group is low, (b) in democratic societies, in which there is a greater sense of being partly responsible for the status quo, and (c) when the hegemonic ideology is one of meritocracy and the Protestant work ethic.
Studies suggest that members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to endorse false consciousness and system-justifying beliefs. For example, in a series of three studies measuring implicit biases, Jost et al. (2002) investigated individuals’ attitudes toward ingroup and outgroup members. In Study 1, the implicit preferences and stereotypes of Stanford University students and San Jose State University (SJSU) students were assessed. Results showed that students from both the higher status and lower status university endorsed stereotypes in line with the statuses of the schools (i.e., Stanford as more academically successful and SJSU as more “extracurricular”). Additionally, although both groups showed greater preference for their own ingroup than outgroup, SJSU students were more than twice as likely as Stanford students to exhibit outgroup preference. In Study 2, White, Latino, and Asian American college students were asked to sign up for discussion with partners from their own group or the other two groups. Results showed that White, Latino, and Asian American students preferred partners who were White. Latinos and Asian Americans were less likely to prefer members of their own group (i.e., Latinos were less likely to prefer another Latino, and Asians were less likely to prefer another Asian). In Study 3, the authors studied archival data to examine whether parents named their male and female babies using the father’s first initial more often than the mother’s first initial. Results showed that in traditional heterosexual families, i.e., families in which the father and mother had the same last name, whereas girls were equally likely to be named after their mother or father, boys were much more likely to be named after their father than their mother. In non-traditional heterosexual families, i.e., families in which the mother and father had different last names, both boys and girls were much more likely to be named using their father’s first
initial. Taken together, the authors suggested that the preference for higher status group members is internalized by both high and low status group members, and this preference contributes to system-justification.

In another series of studies, Jost et al. (2003) showed that members of disadvantaged groups tended to endorse greater justifications of the existing system. In Study 1, the authors found that less educated Americans tended to support limitations on criticisms of the government, and African Americans tended to support limitations on criticisms of the government more than European Americans. In Study 2, level of income in Latinos predicted greater trust in the government, such that lower income Latinos were more likely to trust the government. Study 3 provided support for the authors’ hypothesized relationship between level of income and a belief that income discrepancy is necessary to motivate people to work hard. Results showed that participants with lower income were more likely to endorse the belief that income discrepancy is necessary. In Study 4, Southern African Americans whose income was lower were more likely to endorse a belief in meritocracy, whereas Northern African Americans’ income level was unrelated to their endorsement of meritocracy. Taken together, this series of studies provided support for the idea that members of more disadvantaged groups tend to endorse greater system-justifying beliefs.

More recently, Wiley, Deaux, and Hagelskamp (2012) investigated the belief in meritocracy in first- and second-generation Latino Americans. The authors found that first-generation Latinos were more likely to endorse meritocratic beliefs than second-generation Latinos, and this relationship was partially mediated by estimations of public regard, i.e., perceptions of whether other Americans held them in high regard. That is,
first-generation Latinos were more likely to perceive others as holding them in high regard, which, in turn, led them to endorse greater meritocratic beliefs. The authors also found that in second-generation Latinos, the belief in meritocracy was inversely related to ethnic identity, whereas meritocratic beliefs were not predictive of ethnic identity in first-generation Latinos.

System-justifying beliefs may have both costs and benefits for people of color. O’Brien, Mars, and Eccleston (2011) examined the relationship between system-justifying ideologies and academic success among first-year Latino college students at two time points. The authors found that in first-year Latino college students, endorsement of system-justifying ideologies at Time 1 (beginning of Fall or Winter quarter) was predictive of lower GPAs at Time 2 (beginning of Spring quarter) but a higher sense of belonging to their university. Results of this study suggested that the cost of system-justification may be poorer academic outcomes, but a benefit may be a stronger sense of belonging.

In a series of studies, Kay et al. (2009) investigated Canadians’ tendency to injunctificate, i.e., be motivated to construe the status quo as the most desirable state of affairs. In Study 1, affirmation of the existing government system was experimentally manipulated, such that one group read an article that affirmed the existing government and another group read a neutral article. Participants were then either assigned to the high escapability condition or low escapability condition, such that those in the high escapability condition were led to believe that it was easy to leave Canada and those in the low escapability condition were led to believe that it was difficult to leave Canada. The authors found that participants in the no-affirmation condition were more likely to
use injunctification in the low escapability condition than in the high escapability condition, whereas participants in the affirmation condition used injunctification to the same degree, regardless of high or low escapability.

In Study 2, the system justification motive was experimentally manipulated by having participants believe that their well-being was dependent on either their university or their government (Kay et al., 2009). Results showed that participants’ injunctification was found to be context-specific. That is, participants who were led to believe that their well-being was dependent on their university were more likely to injunctify their university policies, whereas participants who were led to believe that their well-being was dependent on their federal government were more likely to injunctify their government’s policies.

In Study 3, participants’ system dependency was again manipulated, such that some of the participants were led to believe that their well-being depended on their government (Kay et al., 2009). Participants were then led to believe that there were many or few women in politics today. Results showed that participants whose system dependency had been heightened endorsed women’s participation in politics as more desirable when they were led to believe that there were many women in politics today than when they were led to believe that there were few women in politics today. By contrast, among participants whose system-dependency was not manipulated, there was no effect for the status-quo manipulation (many vs. few women in current politics).

In Study 4, participants’ system threat was manipulated such that some participants were led to believe that there was a threat to the current system (Kay et al., 2009). Participants were additionally randomly assigned to a high inequality condition or
low inequality condition, such that some people were led to believe that the disparity between men and women in CEO positions was high and others were led to believe that the disparity was low. Results showed that in the system-threat condition, participants who were in the high inequality condition rated their female experimenter less positively than those who were in the low inequality condition. This series of studies suggested that people exhibit a tendency to justify the status quo, even when the status quo is unfair, and conditions of system threat or dependency strengthens this tendency.

Taken together, the studies on system-justification and false consciousness suggest that people in general have a tendency to justify the status quo and endorse meritocratic beliefs, and that this tendency may be stronger among members of disadvantaged groups or among people who believe that they are dependent on the system. This system-justifying tendency is evident even when justifying the status quo is to their own disadvantage. Based on these studies, it is reasonable to infer that bicultural Koreans who occupy a marginalized status, due to their cultural, racial, and ethnic identity, tend to exhibit a false consciousness, i.e., system-justifying beliefs that perpetuate their own oppression.

**Critical Consciousness**

False consciousness is a construct that can be contrasted with critical consciousness. Whereas false consciousness refers to a constellation of beliefs that serve to justify the status quo, critical consciousness refers to a critical understanding of causality that is integrated with reality rather than “magical” thinking (Freire, 1974, p. 39). Freire defined magical consciousness as a consciousness in which too much power is accorded to facts such that it leads to fatalistic acceptance. Freire argued that a critical
understanding of reality leads to the recognition of possibilities, which in turn leads to critical action.

Critical consciousness may play a role in identity negotiation within the context of asymmetrical power dynamics because it likely buffers individuals from internalizing negative beliefs about their race or culture, which in turn, may make it more likely for them to affirm their racial and cultural identity. Thus, bicultural Koreans who develop a critical consciousness about the asymmetrical power dynamics within the U.S. and between the U.S. and Korea may be more likely to affirm their Korean identity and internalize positive messages about what it means to be Korean.

Research on critical consciousness has provided evidence for its relationship with various factors. Diemer and Li (2011), for example, showed that parental and peer sociopolitical support, i.e., discussion of sociopolitical issues and events, increased disadvantaged youth’s perceived control over sociopolitical change and self-reported participation in sociopolitical action. Diemer, Kaufman, Konig, Trahan, and Hsieh (2006) examined whether urban adolescents’ perceived parental and peer support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice predicted the adolescents’ critical consciousness development. Operationalizing critical consciousness as the capacity for action and reflection on one’s sociopolitical environment, Diemer and colleagues found that urban adolescents’ perceived parental and peer support for challenging racism, sexism, and social injustice predicted their capacity for reflection but not action on their sociopolitical environment.

Watts, Griffith, and Abdul-Adil (1999) examined the effect of the Young Warriors intervention on African American urban adolescent males’ critical consciousness
development. The Young Warriors program is an intervention using rap music videos, television shows, and film as stimuli for critical discussion. The results suggested that the Young Warriors program led to an increase in critical thinking in African American urban adolescent males. However, one limitation of this study is that there was no control group.

Chronister and McWhirter (2006) studied the effectiveness of two group career interventions for battered women. One group included the five most effective career intervention components identified by Brown and Krane (2000), and the second group had the same five components plus six strategies for increasing critical consciousness on the effects of domestic violence on their career development, social contexts, and power dynamics. Results indicated that participants in both intervention groups had significantly higher posttest scores on career-search self-efficacy and critical consciousness than did wait-list control participants. Results also suggested that participants in the standard-plus intervention group, i.e., the intervention which included strategies for increasing critical consciousness, scored higher on critical consciousness at follow-up than participants in the standard intervention group, i.e., the intervention which only included Brown and Krane’s five most effective career intervention components. Additionally, standard-plus participants reported significantly more progress toward goals at follow-up compared to standard participants, suggesting that critical consciousness may be related to progress toward goal achievement.

Based on some of the research on critical consciousness, it is possible to infer that bicultural Koreans’ critical consciousness may vary depending on their perceptions of peer and family sociopolitical support, and critical consciousness may influence their
progress toward career goals. Although there is a paucity of research on the effect of critical consciousness on cultural identity, it is reasonable to assume that individuals’ critical consciousness about their oppressed status is related to their cultural and racial identity negotiation.

**Identity Negotiation**

Bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation is a multilayered process, influenced by their experiences of negotiating their racial and ethnic identities, which are in turn shaped by the context of imperialism. Identity negotiation is a key concept in the field of sociology and political science (Atkin, Ahmad, & Jones, 2002; Scherrer, 2001). The concept derives from the idea that identities are neither constructed solely according to free will nor pre-determined by existing structures (Atkins et al., 2002). Rather, identities are flexible, and individuals negotiate and choose their identities while also being constrained by the systems to which they belong (Scherrer, 2001).

Within the context of imperialism, in which there is an unequal availability of options and disparities in the conferred ability of individuals to choose identities, Koreans must negotiate identities within greater constraints and impositions. Although specific theories that address the identity negotiation of bicultural individuals are limited, general theories on identity abound in the psychological and sociological literature. These theories informed the conceptualization of identity negotiation in the present study, and, as such, are described below.

**Social Identity Theory**

Within *social identity theory* (Turner, 1982), members of a social group “share no more than a collective perception of their own social unity and yet this seems to be
sufficient for them to act as a group” (p. 15). Turner distinguished between self-concept as a cognitive structure and self-images that are subjectively experienced moment-to-moment. Turner asserted that because self-concept as a cognitive structure is relatively stable and enduring, whereas self-images can vary depending on context, it is possible for a person’s self-image to be situationally defined entirely by group membership.

An important component of this theory is that the characteristics of any group are defined only in relation to other groups (Deschamps, 1982). That is, the perceived differences between one group and other groups confer significance to those characteristics of the group. Moreover, these perceived differences become significant only in relation to a common, shared set of values. Based on these basic propositions, the theory also attends to dynamics of power between groups. The dominant group imposes characteristics of other, subordinated groups, using their own definition as the norm. People with power perceive subordinated others in terms of broadly defined group characteristics rather than as individuals, whereas they do not perceive themselves in terms of a group but rather as individuals with unique characteristics. Both the dominant and subordinate groups define themselves against the same norm, i.e., that represented by the dominant group. Thus, “social identity can vary fundamentally as a function of the material and symbolic capital which is owned by the individual” (Deschamps, 1982, p. 90).

Since in the U.S. Koreans are a minority group with less material and symbolic capital than the majority group, their power to define themselves is likely constrained by their subordinated position. The ways in which this limitation affects bicultural Korean’s identity negotiation process has not been examined. While focusing on U.S. imperialist
influences, the present study attended to ways in which a sample of adult bicultural Koreans’ definitions of themselves is constrained by the norms of the dominant group, i.e., White Americans.

**Social Identity Complexity**

When different group identities do not completely overlap, individuals must reconcile the in-group and out-group status of their various group memberships using various forms of identity structure: _intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, or merger_ (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The four models of identity structure are seen as lying on a continuum of cognitive complexity, with intersection on the least cognitively complex end of the spectrum to dominance to compartmentalization, and finally with merger on the most cognitively complex end of the continuum (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

First, in intersection, people reconcile multiple identities by seeing themselves as a single compound category. Thus, multiple memberships are seen to converge into one category. For example, a Korean American will see his or her identity as shared only by other Korean Americans. By contrast, people who use dominance as a means of structuring their identity adopt one primary identity and view others who belong to this primary identity as part of their in-group (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). In the same example of the Korean American, the person may view his or her primary identity as Korean and see other Koreans as part of the in-group whereas other Americans are not. When people use compartmentalization as a means to structure their identity, the primary identity that is activated depends on the context. Thus, a Korean American may identify primarily as Korean when with other Koreans and primarily identify as American when with other Americans. Finally, in merger, multiple group memberships are embraced and
recognized, regardless of context. Thus, a Korean American will consider both Koreans and Americans as part of her in-group.

Bicultural Koreans may, at different points in their lives, use the various forms of identity structure delineated by Roccas and Brewer (2002). The employment of a specific identity structure also depends on other factors, such as ethnic and racial identity, as well as individuals’ levels of adherence to different perceived norms for cultural values and behaviors. One of the limitations of Roccas and Brewer’s model, however, is the lack of attention to contextual factors that may influence the various identity structures as well as the valence assigned to the different identity structures according to cognitive complexity, without a consideration of the multiplicity of factors that may influence these structures. This study sought to attend to the context of power and its impact on the identity negotiation of bicultural Koreans.

**Integrated Model of Identity**

Hammack’s (2008) integrated model of identity attends to some of the complex contextual factors missing in Roccas and Brewer’s (2002) model. In Hammack’s model, identity is comprised of the tripartite levels of personal, social, and cultural; the model also addresses the content, process, and structure of identity. Identity, in this model, is conceptualized as “inherently ideological, assuming a narrative structure and realized in and through social experience” (p. 230). That is, the content of identity is ideological, the structure is narrative, and the process involves social engagement.

Citing Gregg (1991), Hammack posited the ideological nature of identity because life narratives are always constructed within a sociohistorical context of power and inequities. Citing van Dijk (1998), Hammack also highlighted the organizational and
synthesizing function of ideological identification, in which the individual and culture form a symbiotic relationship through ideology. Thus, ideology is the mechanism by which social reproduction occurs through individuals. Specifically, Hammack claimed that a person develops a personal narrative across the life span, which engages the discourses available within particular sociocultural contexts. It is through personal narrative that individuals link their personal identity with the stories of a culture.

Moreover, Hammack argued that identity is always constructed in relation to some other—an individual other or some other social group. That is, an ideology of a group always includes a stance toward other groups, who may be oppressors, subordinates, or one of equal status. The ideology of a group serves to highlight the positioning of a group in the context of other groups.

Hammack (2008) argued that conceptualizing identity as narrative is especially relevant in a globalized world, in which identities and discourses proliferate. Although Hammack attended minimally to the power dynamics that remain in the so-called age of globalization, his argument for a need for continuity through narrative amidst competing discourses is persuasive.

A central concern in Hammack’s (2008) integrated model is the relationship between personal narrative and master narrative, i.e., grand narrative. The extent to which a person reproduces the master narrative or agentically engages and diverges from it is context dependent, according to Hammack. For groups experiencing greater threats to their existential security, greater conformity to the master narrative may be adaptive. Thus, bicultural Koreans who have an awareness of imperialist influences in Korean history may feel a greater need to conform to the master narrative of Koreans as an ethnic
group that has fought against external imperialist threats. On the other hand, because a bicultural Korean in the U.S. likely experience threats to his or her identity as an American due to discrimination experiences, it is also plausible that he or she feels the need to conform to the master narrative of the U.S. as a meritocracy, wherein individuals are viewed as the agents of their own identity. The present study sought to attend to the ways in which bicultural Koreans engage with the master narrative, given U.S. imperialist influences.

Summary

To summarize, U.S. imperialism likely affects not only Koreans’ perception of their own cultural heritage but also the various racialization experiences of bicultural individuals in both Korea and the U.S., which, in turn, may affect their racial identity and ethnic identity (Kim, 2008). These experiences may then affect the process of negotiating a bicultural identity. The various models of identity negotiation in the psychological literature do not fully capture all the complexities of negotiating these multiple identities. The present critical theory study sought to understand the complexity of factors that affect bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation within the framework of U.S. imperialism. The major research questions were: (a) How does U.S. imperialism affect a group of adult bicultural Koreans’ negotiation of their sociocultural identities? (b) How do these adult bicultural Koreans’ experiences of their various sociocultural identities in turn influence their negotiation of a bicultural identity?
Chapter Three  
Method

The present critical theory study had two broad aims: (a) to illuminate the role of U.S. imperialism on bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation, and (b) to raise participants’ awareness of the influence of U.S. imperialism on their bicultural identity in order to empower them to resist oppressive influences that impact their identity negotiation. As such, the methods used in the present study were chosen to facilitate the achievement of both illumination and consciousness-raising.

This study used qualitative methods within a critical paradigm to achieve the dual goals of illumination and consciousness-raising. Being critical involves examining how “structural oppressions get acted out in local contexts” (Ledwith, 2007, p. 598). Thus, I investigated the influence of U.S. imperialism in a group of adult bicultural Koreans’ negotiation of their identity by using group and individual interviews to generate data about participants’ understanding of their identity negotiation.

At the same time, critical methods need to facilitate decolonization by divorcing itself from the so-called neutral stance of objectification (Smith, 1999). That is, critical methods need to also facilitate critical reflection and activism (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). One way to facilitate critical reflection and activism is to raise participants’ awareness of the impact of U.S. imperialism on their identity. In the present study interviews were used as a means to raise participants’ critical consciousness about U.S. imperialist influences.

Participants

In qualitative research, purposeful selection is used for sampling. Purposeful
selection refers to the deliberate selection of informants who can provide rich descriptive answers to the research questions (Maxwell, 2005). The present study used purposeful selection to recruit adult participants in the New York/New Jersey area for a study on “the experience of identifying as both Korean and American.”

Only individuals who resided in both Korea and the U.S. for at least 5 years were asked to take part. Volunteers were administered the two-item Cultural Identification measure (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005), described below, as a screening tool. To ensure that participants identified as bicultural, only individuals whose score on each item was four or greater were invited to participate. Seven people were screened and met the criteria. Two were unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts.

Five adult bicultural Koreans participated in the study. Four of the participants were men and one was a woman. At the time of the focus group and individual interviews, one participant was in her twenties, one was in his thirties, and three were in their forties. All of the participants endorsed identification with Korean and American identities, scoring 4 or above on each item of the Cultural Identification measure. A summary of participants’ demographic characteristics is provided in Table 1.

**Design**

This study used critical hermeneutics to co-create a text about Korean bicultural individuals’ experiences of negotiating their identities within the context of U.S. imperialism. A hermeneutic approach highlights the fact that all interpretation is situated (Kinsella, 2006). That is, interpretations are located within, and thereby constrained by, a specific sociopolitical context. In addition, a critical hermeneutic approach seeks to give voice to oppressed groups. While acknowledging that all interpretation is situated, a
Table 1

Participants’ Characteristics and Cultural Identification Endorsement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age at immigration</th>
<th>Korean Identification</th>
<th>American Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40’s</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40’s</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40’s</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Participants’ names are pseudonyms. Korean and American identifications were based on the CI (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005).
critical hermeneutic approach also allows for the potential to engage in consciousness-raising, which can lead to transcendence of the present context (Kinsella, 2006).

This study consisted of two stages: First, a focus group was conducted to introduce the concept of U.S. imperialism to a group of bicultural Korean adult participants and raise their awareness about the influence of U.S. imperialism on their identity negotiation. Second, follow-up interviews were conducted with individual focus group participants to obtain a more detailed and personal understanding of how U.S. imperialism influences each individual’s identity negotiation process.

Focus groups are ideally suited for raising awareness around a topic because they often help individuals connect the personal with the political while also facilitating the formation of a collective identity, which can lead to grassroots change (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). Using individual interviews as a follow-up to focus groups allows a researcher to obtain greater depth and detail than the data generated by the focus group (Morgan, 1997). This two-step process also allows the researcher to gather data about perspectives that may be underrepresented in the focus group (Morgan, 1997). Moreover, because the concept of U.S. imperialism was first introduced in the focus group, follow-up individual interviews provided an opportunity for the participants to discuss the impact of U.S. imperialism on their identity negotiation after they had time to reflect on the topic. In this way, the catalytic aspect of the study was maximized.

**Focus Groups**

There are several advantages to the use of focus groups in qualitative research. One advantage lies in producing concentrated data in a particular area or topic, and the other is the use of group interaction as a source of data (Morgan, 1997). That is, focus
groups allow a researcher to focus the topic of the group interview while also allowing
the group to direct the flow and depth of the discussion. Focus groups also permit greater
inclusion of the participants’ voices in the research process by encouraging their active
participation in formulating and directing the research questions (van Staveren, 1997).
Moreover, focus groups allow individual participants to build upon the responses of other
participants (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Focus groups are ideally suited for research that seeks to empower participants
because it is a contextual method and it reduces the power differential between the
researcher and researched (Wilkinson, 1999). Wilkinson asserted that a focus group
creates a social context in which the group members negotiate meanings through
interaction. That is, individuals do not speak to the researcher in isolation; rather, they
speak to each other to collectively make sense of their experiences. Wilkinson also
pointed out that compared to individual interviews, focus groups reduce the researcher’s
power by placing more control of the group interaction in the hands of participants.

The planning of a focus group requires special attention to several issues,
including who is invited to participate and how the researcher interacts with the group
(Morgan, 1997). The first consideration in focus groups is the issue of privacy. Because
what participants share with the interviewer is also shared with the group, it is important
to address this issue explicitly at the outset, as part of the informed consent procedure.

Second, the size and makeup of the group are important considerations. Smaller
groups may produce more detailed data, whereas larger groups provide a greater diversity
of opinions (Morgan, 1997). The present study recruited five participants for the focus
group. In terms of the makeup of the group, although efforts were made to recruit
individuals who were not acquainted with one another because acquaintances are likely to have existing, implicit boundaries about what is and is not discussed (Morgan, 1997), given the specificity of the selection criteria and the inherently smaller bicultural Korean community in the N.Y./N.J. area, it was difficult to avoid recruiting people who were acquainted. On the other hand, a few researchers have posited advantages to using existing community groups in which the members are acquainted with each other. That is, negotiating with the group as a collective identity rather than with each individual participant allows for greater anonymity and protection from the researcher (Farquhar & Das, 1999).

Third, the level of moderator involvement and the structure in the group need to be considered. As Watkins and Shulman (2008) pointed out, to facilitate research that empowers participants, the researcher must give up the control traditionally afforded to investigators so as to create a dialogical and collaborative research process. Moreover, goal of the present study was to facilitate critical reflection on the power dynamics that influence participants’ identity negotiation. As such, the present moderators’ role was not only to facilitate discussion but also to raise consciousness, modeled after Freire’s (1974) coordinator. According to Freire, the coordinator’s role is to facilitate critical consciousness. As such, one role of the present moderators was to help the participants to critically view their experiences in the context of U.S. imperialism in order to facilitate a critical response to structural oppression. The moderators did not control the group interaction. Rather, by explicitly introducing the idea of U.S. imperialism as a significant influence on the process of identity negotiation and by encouraging the group to make collective sense of this concept in relation to their experiences, the moderators attempted
to facilitate consciousness-raising within the group.

Each participant was sent the focus group stimuli in advance of the meeting. The stimuli consisted of a brief introduction to the concept of U.S. imperialism written in layman’s language (Appendix A) and an excerpt from a memoir (Keller, 2004; Appendix B), about a Korean American child’s encounter with racism and her struggle with her identity. These materials were chosen to draw attention to U.S. imperialism, which includes racialized ideology and experiences, as the framework which would ground the discussion on bicultural identity negotiation.

The focus group discussion began with the moderators asking the participants to re-read the stimuli in order to refresh their memory and to ensure that those who had not read the material prior to coming to the meeting had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the material. After reading the stimuli silently, participants were asked a series of questions, based on the focus group protocol. Participants were not asked any explicit questions regarding the focus group stimulus, largely because the pilot participants appeared to struggle with a more open-ended question regarding the readings. Instead, the stimulus was used as a means of priming them for the discussion around power dynamics and identity. As described below, the focus group protocol was used to facilitate participants’ discussion about how power dynamics influence their negotiation of their sociocultural identities.

I served as the principal moderator of the focus group, assisted by a second moderator. The demographic characteristics, educational background and training, personality, and compatibility with the group members are some of the factors to consider when selecting the moderator of a focus group (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Several
considerations went into the decision to moderate the group myself. First, given the sensitivity of the topic, it was determined that my demographic characteristics and cultural identification (i.e., being a bicultural Korean) would contribute to comfort and cohesion among the group members. Second, it was important that the moderator have some awareness of and experience with group dynamics (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). As a counseling psychologist-in-training, I have some experience in group facilitation. Finally, and most importantly, an additional role of the moderator for the focus group was to raise awareness of the influence of U.S. imperialism on the participants’ process of negotiating their identity. Since I, as the investigator, was familiar with the research concepts, I was best equipped to raise awareness around the concept of U.S. imperialism. However, because I was both the researcher and the moderator, it was important that I attend to the biases that I bring into the study and into the focus group. As such, my biases are discussed below.

The assistant moderator was a Korean American man in his thirties, who was a former social worker. He was also a member of a grassroots organization of Korean Americans engaged in critical analysis and activism around U.S.-Korea relations. He identified as a 1.5-generation Korean American, who was interested in bicultural Koreans’ mental health, and he had a critical understanding of U.S.-Korea history. Prior to the focus group, the assistant moderator read the dissertation proposal, the focus group stimuli and protocol, and we had an extensive discussion about our role as moderators of the focus group.

**Focus Group and Interview Protocols**

The focus group protocol (see Appendix C) was created to reflect the research
questions and to empower participants to voice their opinions on the topic. The semi-structured questions were developed based on the feedback from two pilot participants. The questions were designed to (a) raise critical consciousness by explicitly connecting U.S. imperialism with the negotiation of participants’ racial, ethnic, and cultural identities; and (b) empower participants to voice their own struggles in negotiating their bicultural identity. Thus, the focus group protocol was used flexibly to allow participants’ interactions to direct the flow of discussion in achieving these two goals.

The focus group protocol included questions about participants’ earliest memories related to being Korean in the U.S., beliefs or messages about Korea/Koreans and America/Americans, perceptions of how they are viewed by White Americans and how this affects their identity, and how the power difference between the U.S. and Korea affect their identity.

Individual interviews with participants, all of which were completed within two months following the focus group, were also semi-structured. The protocol for these interviews (Appendix D) was based on the themes that emerged from the focus group. Moreover, participants of the focus group were encouraged to generate questions for the individual interview protocol, and these were included in the final protocol. The individual interview protocol included follow-up questions using themes raised in the focus group, such as how beliefs about “American” being “White” might affect their identity, whether Koreans are beneficiaries of U.S. goodwill and how such a belief might affect their identity, whether “ignorance-based racism” is a systemic issue and how such a belief might affect their identity, how their identity is affected by Korea’s international status, and how the model minority stereotype affects their identity.
**Instruments**

*Cultural Identification.* Benet-Martinez and Haritatos’s (2005) Cultural Identification (CI) measure was selected as a screening tool because it is brief and face valid. Benet-Martinez and Haritatos used the measure to assess the strength of participants’ identification with two cultures. However, these authors did not provide psychometric information on their measure.

For the present study, the two-item CI was modified to reflect Korean (rather than Chinese) cultural identity. The items were (a) How much do you identify with Korean culture? and (b) How much do you identify with American culture? Each item is rated on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (very weakly identified) to 6 (highly identified). Because bicultural individuals, by definition, identify with two cultures, a score of $\geq 4$ on each item was used as the criterion for the selection of participants. It was reasoned that a score of 4 would indicate an endorsement of identification with a particular culture. The bicultural individuals in Benet-Martinez and Haritatos’s (2005) study, scored $M = 3.7$ on U.S. identification and $M = 4.6$ on Chinese identification, with $SDs = 1.3$ and 1.2, respectively. The present participants scored $M = 5$ ($SD = 0.7$) for Korean identification and $M = 5.4$ ($SD = 0.3$) for U.S. identification.

**Pilot Study**

Prior to the focus group, the stimulus materials and protocol were piloted with two people recruited from among the researcher’s acquaintances. Although both pilot participants were Koreans residing in the U.S., they were not formally screened using the CI measure. Both participants were men. One was a Korean American in his thirties, and had resided in Korea for six years and in the U.S. for 31 years. The other participant
was a Korean in his forties, and had resided in Korea for 30 years and in the U.S. for 11 years.

The group session was audiotaped but not transcribed, and the data obtained from the pilot focus group was not included in the final analysis. Rather, its purpose was to obtain feedback on the stimulus materials and protocol. Feedback was elicited immediately following the pilot session as well as a few days after the session.

The pilot participants suggested that I should be more explicit and upfront about the framework of U.S. imperialism as the focus of the study. They suggested that I provide a written overview of the concept of U.S. imperialism in layperson’s terms as a way to introduce the topic before beginning the questions.

Stimulus A was created in response to this feedback. One of the pilot participants read this new stimulus and indicated that it was easy to understand and succeeded in introducing the concept of U.S. imperialism.

Stimulus B was expanded from its original version to include a passage on the author’s struggle with her Korean and American identity. This expansion was based on the pilot participants’ struggle to connect the excerpt to their experiences with identity. The amended version of the excerpt was thought to better capture the theme of bicultural identity negotiation.

Prior to the individual interviews, the final individual interview protocol, which was modified based on the emergent themes from the focus group, was piloted with one of the two participants from the pilot group. The purpose of this pilot interview was to help refine the individual interview questions. The pilot interview was audiotaped but not transcribed, and the data was not included in the final analysis. Since the pilot
participant reported that the interview questions were easy to understand, the same protocol was used for the five interviews with the actual participants.

**Procedure**

Attempts to recruit participants for the study involved (a) asking my family members to identify individuals among their friends and acquaintances who may be interested in participating in the study, and (b) sending recruitment emails to various Korean/Korean American and Asian American organizations, such as the National Association of Korean Americans (see email solicitation in Appendix E). The latter method failed to recruit any volunteers, and all of the participants were recruited by family members or their friends and acquaintances. I contacted potential volunteers via email or phone to solicit participation. Only people with whom I had no personal relationship were asked to take part in the study.

Potential participants were screened for inclusion (i.e., residence requirement and scores on the CI measure). Individuals who met both criteria were asked to commit to one group interview and a follow-up phone interview. Those who agreed to participate were scheduled for a group interview at a convenient, private location.

Light refreshments were provided to the focus group participants to facilitate building rapport with the participants and to facilitate the group session. Prior to the group discussion, participants were asked to sign the informed consent (see Appendix F), which described the study, its voluntary and confidential nature, the right to withdraw at any time, and the fact that the group and individual interviews would be audiotaped. A $25 gift certificate to Target was offered to each participant as compensation for participating in the focus group.
Participants were also informed that they would be contacted for follow-up individual phone interviews after the focus group, for which they were offered an additional $25 gift certificate. Referrals to professional mental health counselors were provided after the focus group in case a participant wanted to discuss his or her experiences further.

The beginning of a focus group is important for establishing the agenda for the group and for creating comfort among group members (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Along with reading the informed consent, the moderators facilitated a discussion on issues of privacy and confidentiality among the group members. A brief period was also allotted for the moderators and group members to introduce themselves.

During the focus group, participants at first seemed to address the moderators, but as the group warmed up, they interacted with each other. As one member of the group revealed his painful experience of racism in the workplace and his subsequent negative emotions toward Whites, the other members appeared to be somewhat uncomfortable with his narrative although they did not vocalize their discomfort. The other members of the group appeared to connect to each other for the most part, while the member who revealed his racism experience was mostly quiet. Except to respond to questions, he did not interact with the other members of the group.

The focus group session lasted for approximately two hours. At the close of the group session, I summarized the discussion, as suggested by Krueger (1998). This process gave participants the opportunity to add any important points that were missed or provide feedback on perceived miscommunications.

It is important in critical participatory research that participants are given space
to “ask questions back” (Oakley, 1981, p. 42). That is, the participants need to be allowed to pose questions to the researcher, and the researcher must demonstrate honesty in answering questions and creating dialogue, so that mutual self-disclosure leads to greater understanding (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). As Oakley argued, the researcher needs to become “more than an instrument of data-collection” (p. 48). As such, the participants were encouraged to pose questions to me about my research, and these questions were addressed prior to and during the group.

Following the focus group, I transcribed the narrative and identified tentative themes, which were sent to the participants. Participants were invited to preview the interview questions prior to the individual interview. I conducted each individual interview over the phone. The interviews were audiotaped.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The analysis of the transcripts from the focus group and individual interviews was based in critical hermeneutics. As Havercamp and Young (2005) articulated, “the critical hermeneutics approach to understanding text is concerned both with how an individual understands his or her situation and with the historical or social forces that are presumed to have distorted that understanding” (p. 278).

Thus, codes were based on two levels of the text. One level was the overall themes, structure, and plot that were explicitly manifest in the group discussion and in the individual interviews. The second level was the ways in which sociocultural contextual factors may have distorted or influenced the manifest discussion and interview responses.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith & Osborn, 2008) was used to interpret the themes from the focus group and individual interviews. According to
Smith and Osborn, “IPA combines an empathic hermeneutics with a questioning hermeneutics” (p. 53). That is, IPA seeks to join participants in understanding their points of view while also adopting a critical eye toward the text. The two-pronged goal of empowering the participants’ voices while applying a critical frame makes IPA suitable for a critical theory study.

IPA is an idiographic approach to qualitative data in which individual cases are examined in depth before they are compared across cases (Smith & Osborn, 2008). As such, the transcript of the focus group session and each individual session were analyzed individually before an attempt was made to find common themes across the data.

Prior to the analysis, I trained the judges by asking them to read the study proposal, which included the research aim and questions, a review of the relevant literature, and the methods used for data collection and analysis. The judges were also asked to read a chapter by Smith and Osborn (2008) on IPA. The judges then conferenced via Skype to discuss any questions or concerns about the method of analysis as well as to reflect on our backgrounds and identities, assumptions, biases, and expectations for the study. Descriptions of the judges’ identities, assumptions, and biases are described later in this chapter.

The focus group narrative was analyzed first. The analysis of the focus group transcript began by reading the transcript, making notations about what the judges found interesting or significant (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Because the aim of IPA is to understand the meaning of the text rather than measure the frequency of themes, there are no rules about what is noted as interesting (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In subsequent readings, titles of emerging themes were identified (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Thus, the
initial notes were used to construct concise phrases that capture the meaning, and analysis moved to a slightly higher level of abstraction.

Within the analysis of each transcript, judges paid particular attention to how the influence of contextual factors, such as imperialism or racism, manifested in the narratives. This level of analysis was conducted using Anderson and Jack’s (1991) “three ways of listening” (p. 19). Situated within feminist research, this method of analysis emphasizes the subtle expressions of thoughts and feelings that fall “outside the boundaries of acceptability” (p. 11).

First, the judges attended to the person’s use of moral language, that is, participants’ moral self-evaluative statements that spoke to the relationship between a person’s self-concept and cultural norms (e.g., “I feel like I sold out”). Secondly, the judges listened to the person’s meta-statements. These are points in the interview in which a person comments on his or her own thoughts or statements (e.g., “That sort of makes me sound racist, doesn’t it?”) Meta-statements provide information on the categories that individuals use to monitor or judge their own thoughts. Finally, the judges listened to the logic of the narrative, attending to any discrepancies in the person’s statements and the ways in which recurring themes relate to each other (e.g., “Being connected to others is important. But, at the end of the day, we all die alone, you know?”) Listening to the internal logic of a person’s narrative allowed for an understanding about the beliefs that undergird a person’s interpretation of his or her own experience.

After the themes were identified in the focus group narrative, the next step was to make connections among them (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Each judge determined which
of the themes were superordinate and which could be clustered together as subordinate themes. Throughout this process, the transcript was examined to ensure a close association between emerging themes and original text. Next, the themes were ordered in table format to delineate the relationship among them and to note identifiers (example phrases from the text) for each theme. Page and line numbers were noted to indicate where each theme can be found in the original text (Smith & Osborn, 2008). After the analysis of the focus group narrative had been independently completed by each judge, I integrated the tables created by each judge into one unified table, which was then distributed to the two other judges for feedback and edits.

According to Smith and Osborn’s (2008) guidelines, once the process of analyzing the focus group data was completed, the process was repeated for each individual interview transcript. The list of themes generated from the focus group was used to inform the subsequent analyses. However, judges remained open to new themes that emerged in each case while also recognizing repeating patterns. Each judge independently created a table for each interview transcript. After all of the interview transcripts were analyzed independently, I constructed a final table integrating the themes that emerged across all the data. This table was distributed to the judges for feedback and revision.

Because IPA attends to what is significant in each case rather than which theme emerged most frequently across the cases, the judges did not pay particular attention to how consistent or different the themes were in the focus group versus the individual interviews. Rather, the focus group transcript was treated as the first case and the follow-up individual interview transcripts were treated as subsequent cases. As such, the final
table of themes in Chapter Four reflects aggregated data across the two modalities.

Although not an explicit part of IPA, memo-writing was used throughout the analysis. Often used in grounded theory research, memo-writing is a means of recording the researcher’s reflections, delineating the comparisons and connections across the data, and developing questions to continually guide the research (Charmaz, 2006). The three judges in this study used memo-writing to (a) record questions and reflections regarding the codes, (b) communicate the judges’ affective responses, and (c) reflect on biases and assumptions about the data that may be influencing the analysis. The judges shared their memos with each other and often commented on each other’s memos. Thus, memo-writing also became an important source of discussion among judges throughout the analysis.

Validity

The validity of a qualitative study is judged by its trustworthiness (Williams & Morrow, 2010). Moreover, psychopolitical validity is important in a critical research endeavor (Prilleltensky, 2008). Another validity used in feminist research is catalytic validity (Lather, 1991). According to Williams and Morrow, the trustworthiness of a study is grounded in (a) the integrity of the data, i.e., clear articulation of methods, sufficient quality and quantity of data, richness of analytic categories, and the fit between interpretation and data; (b) balance between participant and researcher interpretation; (c) clear communication and application of findings. The present study maximized trustworthiness through the articulation of its design, procedure, and findings, collection of rich data, the inclusion and honoring of participant voices in the data collection and analysis, and the development of meaningful categories supported by the data.
The psychopolitical validity of a study is based on (a) the systematic articulation of the role of power in the dynamics that affect the phenomena of interest, and (b) the facilitative power of the study for reducing inequities and promoting political action (Prilleltensky, 2008). The present study explored the influence of U.S. imperialism on a group of adult bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation, both in the literature review and in the data collection and analysis. Although the study was not a participatory-action study, through the interactive process of data collection, I sought to empower participants and raise critical consciousness. In this way, the study facilitated participants’ awareness of inequities to promote their empowerment.

The catalytic validity of a study is gauged by the extent to which a study prompts critical reflection and action in the researcher and participants, transforming their reality (Lather, 1991). The present study sought to raise the critical consciousness of the participants around U.S. imperialism and its influence on their identity negotiation. Thus, themes related to increased critical consciousness would provide evidence of catalytic validity.

**Positionality and Reflexivity**

Researcher reflexivity is a critical aspect of qualitative methodology. In the present study, I conducted the focus group, along with an assistant moderator. I conducted all of the individual interviews and guided the data analysis process. Moreover, because I am part of the same society in which the participants are embedded and therefore cannot be a neutral observer, it is important to acknowledge my biases and expectations and reflect on the consequences and implications of these biases and expectations for the data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006).
**Researcher.** I have lived 15.5 years of my life in Korea, 18 years in the U.S., and 3.5 years in other, mostly western countries. As a Korean national with permanent residency in the U.S., I have been influenced by my ex-diplomat father to value my Korean heritage and culture. At the same time, having lived in western countries for over half of my life, especially the U.S., I have adopted many mainstream American values and behaviors. Although I identify as a Korean, this identification partly reflects my awareness of being a citizen of a country with a history of having been colonized, first by Japan, then by the U.S. For this reason, I feel the need to own and assert my Korean identity as an act of resistance to the colonization by countries with greater political and military might. That is, for me, identifying as a Korean is partially a political act.

Although I identify as bicultural, I do not feel a strong belongingness to either Korean or American culture, experiencing my identity as fluidly shifting according to the context. When I am with my Korean friends, I speak Korean and find that some of my Korean values and behaviors are activated. At the same time, my American values also become more salient because I am aware of how they differentiate me from the people around me. My awareness of this difference keeps me from feeling a full sense of belonging with my Korean culture. Likewise, when I am with my American friends, although I speak English and behave “American” for the most part, I am also keenly aware of how my Korean values and identity separate me from them.

Race plays a significant role in my bicultural experience. When I am with Koreans or other East Asians, the salience of race is low for me, whereas when I am with non-Asian Americans, race is much more salient. Especially when associating with White Americans, my awareness of racism is activated, simultaneously pressuring me to
conform to mainstream American culture while desiring to identify and associate with other Koreans.

Based on these experiences, I had specific expectations about the results of this study. I expected that participants would have varying degrees of awareness of the influence of U.S. imperialism on Korea and Koreans. However, I assumed that regardless of the level of awareness, bicultural Koreans residing in the U.S. are affected by U.S. imperialism. The impact of U.S. imperialism is likely to be more explicit and salient when participants have an awareness of imperialist influences, such that the participants would have experienced some internal conflict around making sense of their identity in a bicultural context. However, even people who were not aware of U.S. imperialist influences were assumed to be affected by it, because all personal experiences are embedded in the larger social context. As such, I expected that Koreans living in the U.S. who were not aware of the imperialist influences would have accepted the ideology of mainstream America, including color-blindness and meritocracy, and incorporated it into their values and identity.

**Other judges.** One of the other two judges was a woman in her 30’s, who at the time of the analysis was a graduate student in a social work Ph.D. program. She immigrated to the U.S. from Korea at the age of 13 but identifies as Asian American rather than Korean American. Although she does not identify strongly as either Korean or American, she embraces her hyphenated identity as Asian American. She believed in advocating for the pan-Asian American identity as well as aligning with other minority groups for political empowerment. She came from an owning class background but transitioned to working class when her family immigrated to the U.S. She reported that
an awareness of Japanese colonialism and an anti-Japan ethnonational identity was a significant part of her early education and family life.

This judge grew up in a culturally diverse city that she felt affirmed her Asian American identity. Thus, she reported that when she was younger race became salient for her when she was around White people. However, entering adulthood, the second judge reported that race became salient whenever she was around people who were oblivious to racial/ethnic/cultural identity issues and politics. She reported that she becomes frustrated around people who are unaware of racial realities, including people of color who have internalized racism.

This judge identified as “a postcolonial socialist feminist (with an anti-racism, anti-homophobia, anti-classism bent).” She believed that the assumptions that imperialism and orientalism are serious and significant problems that are entrenched in the American psyche and continue to harm Whites and people of color within and outside the U.S. She reported expectations that most of the participants would likely not be aware of issues of racism and imperialism.

The third judge was a male graduate student in his 20’s, who at the start of the analysis was completing his master’s program in mental health counseling and has subsequently entered a Ph.D. program in counseling psychology. He identified as biracial Black and White but reported not feeling a strong sense of belonging to either racial group. He reported a constant awareness of his identities due to frequently being identified as Black without recognition of his White identity.

This judge reported that he expected several of his biases to influence his coding. First, he assumed that racial and cultural issues influence people but that this influence is
commonly outside of their awareness. He assumed that racism, especially microaggressions, influence people’s negotiation of their identity at both a conscious and unconscious level. Further, his bias is that individuals who are aware of racism experiences likely negotiate their identity using strategies that are more helpful than individuals who are unaware of racism experiences. Like the other judge, this judge also reported the expectation that most of the participants would be unaware of issues of racism and power dynamics.
Chapter 4

Results

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the analysis of the focus group and individual interviews resulted in one consolidated list of themes. Although the findings presented below do not differentiate the focus group from the individual interview narratives, it is important to note that what emerged in the individual interviews was likely influenced by the focus group discussion. Indeed, during the individual interview, many of the participants referenced the focus group discussion, stating that the discussion confirmed their sense of connection to other Korean Americans. Many participants also noted how the group discussion raised their awareness of issues such as race, racism, and power dynamics.

Additionally, and perhaps most notably, one participant appeared to retreat from some of the sentiments he expressed in the focus group discussion, apparently due to a sense of alienation from the other members in the group. This participant had been the most explicit about his experiences of racism, his hostility toward Whites, and his subsequent strong identification as a Korean. Although he maintained many of these attitudes, he did appear to endorse a more color-blind and individualistic ideology during the individual interview and also expressed some guilt about his hostility toward Whites. These changes appeared to be partly in reaction to his sense of difference from the other four members of the group, who endorsed color-blind and individualistic ideologies.

Aside from this particular participant, the other four members of the focus group generally appeared to agree with each other about the various themes that emerged. One participant reported an explicit belief in the U.S. as liberator of Korea. The other
members voiced varying degrees of agreement with this belief; however, none voiced outright disagreement until the individual interviews, when a few participants voiced disagreement.

The analysis of the focus group and individual interviews resulted in 12 overarching themes: (a) Immigrant Experience/Foreigner Status, (b) Racialization, (c) Racism, (d) Racial Triangulation, (e) Color-Blind Ideology, (f) Individualistic Ideology, (g) False Consciousness, (h) Critical Consciousness, (i) U.S. Imperialism/Colonial Mentality, (j) Emotions/Affect, (k) Intersectionality, (l) Negotiation of Self-Identity. These themes were further categorized into subthemes.

It is important to note that the themes and subthemes are not mutually exclusive. That is, some of the subthemes and themes overlap. For example, some of the subthemes of Immigrant Experience/Foreigner Status could also fall under the themes of Racism or Racial Triangulation but were clustered together because they depicted the common experience of immigrants. Additionally, although there is some overlap among the themes of Racialization, Racism, and Racial Triangulation, the latter theme highlights how Asian Americans are racialized and pitted against other people of color, most notably Blacks, as a means to preserve White supremacy without the specter of White on Black racism. That is, Racial Triangulation is one means by which racism is perpetuated while being framed as an Asian or Black problem. Lastly, some of the themes are contradictory, such as False Consciousness and Critical Consciousness; however, this contradiction was understood as reflective of the experience of the participants.

The following sections discuss the themes and subthemes, using quotes from the narrative to illustrate the subthemes. Some of the quotes illustrate multiple subthemes.
Pseudonyms are used to protect participants’ privacy. Quotes from the focus group are marked with (F), while quotes from individual interviews are marked with (I).

**Immigrant Experience/Foreigner Status**

Participants described various experiences associated with being an immigrant and having a foreigner status. The following subthemes, capturing participants’ immigrant experience and status as foreigners, were identified: (a) culture shock & denial of impact, (b) loss of voice/belonging, (d) cultural naïveté/becoming a fool, (e) accent/lack of English fluency as marker of foreigner status (d) separation from family to seek American dream.

**Culture shock and denial of impact.** Participants noted instances in which, as immigrants to the U.S., they felt culture shock; at the same time, they appeared to deny its impact. For example, when asked about the earliest memory associated with their Korean identity, Michael stated, “I would say, for me, the moment I got here in San Francisco Airport, because I came here when I was 19, so, there was definitely culture shock, the moment I got here” (F). At the same time, Michael denied the impact of this culture shock on his identity, reporting, “Um, I didn’t feel that…different at the moment. It’s just something that I have to absorb, I guess, just face it” (F).

**Loss of voice/belonging.** Participants also reported a loss of voice or sense of belonging as a result of immigrating to the U.S. Michael remembered when first entering the country, he was asked, “‘are you a resident,’ you know, those immigration questions” (F). Steven noted his parents’ loss of voice:

Here if [my parents] get into fight [with Americans], you just have to listen. You, all you can do is, your, you know, your-your face, you know, becoming so red. All
you can say is, “Y-you…” That’s all you can say because what would, (group member: mm) you know the American people just (snaps fingers) just blasts it out, what they want to say, and my parents just listen. (F)

**Cultural naïveté/becoming a fool.** Participants remembered times that made apparent their naïveté about American culture or times in which they became a “fool” due to cultural and language differences. Jonathan recounted the following:

Um, I remember, uh, being on the airplane, asking for s—like, in Korea, it’s Chilseong Cider is Seven-Up, right (Michael: mm-hmm)—I kept asking for cider, they kept giv—bringing me apple juice, (group member laughs) and I kept getting frustrated, you know, cider, right? (F)

Michael noted, “my aunt has to come and explain everything to me” (F). Steven remembered, “...some people yell at me and say, uh, you know, ‘Hey, Chino,’ which, I didn’t know; I [thought] it was a ‘hi.’ So I said, ‘Hi. (Jonathan laughs) He said, ‘Chino!’ And I said, ‘Hi!’” (F)

**Accent/lack of English fluency as marker of non-American identity.** Some participants appeared to identify their own or others’ accent or lack of English fluency as a marker of their status as foreigners or their non-American identity. For example, Steven noted, “And there, the, the chief of, uh, animal control center was Korean person, who probably grew up here, and, he was a very old person, but had a thick accent, uh, but although he was Korean” (F). He went on to state, “he called me up one day and said, ‘Come here. Are you Chinese or Korean?’ and I said, with broken English, I said, ‘I’m American’ (laughs)” (F).
Table 2

*Themes and Subthemes*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Experience/Foreigner Status</td>
<td>Culture shock &amp; denial of impact</td>
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<td>Loss of voice/loss of belonging</td>
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<td>Cultural naïveté/becoming a fool</td>
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<td>Accent/lack of English as a marker of non-American identity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Separation from family to seek American dream</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racialization</td>
<td>Undifferentiated racial grouping/homogeneity as Asian</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Phenotypic identification/biologically based conception of race</td>
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<td>Seen as racial/cultural stereotype vs. individual</td>
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<td>Seen as other/White normativity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>Discrimination in the workplace</td>
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<td>Need to prove self to Whites寻求ing White validation</td>
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<td>Belief/message that American = White</td>
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<th>Themes</th>
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<td>Violence against Asians</td>
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<td>Marginalization of/microaggression against Asians</td>
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<td>American affluence not accessible to people of color</td>
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<td>Powerlessness</td>
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<td>Racial Triangulation</td>
<td>Positing systemic racism as a Black/White problem</td>
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<td>Questioning location of Asians among racial field</td>
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<td>Identification with Whites vs. other people of color</td>
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<td>Stereotyping other racial groups as foils to the “model minority” Asians</td>
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<td>Perpetual foreigner status/need to assert American identity</td>
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<td>Conditional acceptance of Asians by Whites</td>
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<td>Model minority stereotype engendering hostility from other racial groups</td>
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<td>Acceptance of and adherence to the model minority myth</td>
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| Color-Blind Ideology | Assimilation held as ideal                                                | (table continues)
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<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Minimization/denial of racialization</td>
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<td>Emphasizing ethnic diversity among Whites to avoid talking about race</td>
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<td>Assumption of a level playing field</td>
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<td>Colorblindness posited as ideal</td>
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<td>Positing connection to all human beings regardless of race</td>
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<td>Individualistic Ideology</td>
<td>Wanting to be seen as individual</td>
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<td>Identity negotiation as a purely individual process</td>
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<td>Decontextualized view of culture</td>
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<td>View of history as disconnected from individual reality</td>
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<td>View of racism/racial identity as disconnected from individual reality</td>
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<td>Positing individualistic solution to systemic problem</td>
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<td>Positing systemic issue as individual issue</td>
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<td>False Consciousness</td>
<td>Absolving Whites of their role in racism</td>
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<td>Internalized stereotypes/internalized racism</td>
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<td>Holding Korean Americans/Asian Americans responsible for racism experience</td>
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<td>Need to posit optimism about racism/racialization</td>
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<td>Denying impact of racism on self-identity</td>
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<td>Distancing from racism by locating racism outside of place of residence</td>
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<td>Critical Consciousness</td>
<td>Asserting the need for political action to counter power dynamics</td>
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<td>Korean identification in response to power dynamics/racism</td>
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<td>Offering a critical understanding of history</td>
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<td>Acknowledgment/awareness of racism/power dynamics</td>
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<td>Focus group facilitating new consciousnessa</td>
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<td>U.S. Imperialism/Colonial Mentality</td>
<td>U.S. as liberator/savior</td>
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<td>U.S. citizenship/English fluency privileged in Korea</td>
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<td>Denial of Korean identity/need to identify as American</td>
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<td>Koreans associated with U.S. intervention</td>
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<td>Placing responsibility for U.S. imperialism on Korea</td>
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<td>Korea’s status elevating Korean American identity</td>
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<td>Acknowledgment &amp; acceptance of U.S. imperialism</td>
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<td>Discomfort with negative stance toward the U.S./avoiding blaming the U.S.</td>
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<td>Ideology of Social Darwinism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotions/Affect</td>
<td>Suppression/minimization of affect around racism</td>
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*Note.* Emerged only in the individual interviews
Separation from family to seek American dream. A theme shared by some of the participants was the experience, as immigrants, of separating from their family to seek the American dream. Natalie remembered the following:

So, um, but I came first because it was kind of like, late into, um, my education, so I said, why don’t you, my parents were like, “why don’t you go first?” So, but that, so anyways, I think that in retrospect, like the reason why I so readily said, “yeah, sure let’s leave” was because to me, America sounded more like a place that offered, like, choices and options, different options… (F)

Steven’s experience echoed a similar theme:

But only catch was I had to come here alone because no, not, no my family member was American; I was only one. But that was only catch. But I think I was a little immature or…a little, I don’t know, I don’t wanna call it idiotic, but I didn’t really think too much. Well, I’ll go. I really didn’t feel that I would be alone there. I just felt that I will go, and I can do anything, I will go. (F)

Racialization

The theme of racialization, which refers to “the creation and characterization of racial categories” (C. J. Kim, 1999, p. 105), emerged in participants’ accounts, regardless of whether they appeared to be aware of their racialized experiences. The subthemes that captured participants’ experiences of racialization included (a) undifferentiated racial grouping/homogeneity as Asian, (b) phenotypic identification/biologically based conceptualization of race, (c) seen as racial/cultural stereotype vs. individual, (d) seen as other/White normativity.
Undifferentiated racial grouping/homogeneity as Asian. Participants remembered incidents in which they were automatically grouped with other Asians and treated as a homogeneous group. Jonathan recalled the following:

Every time there’s a teasing, it’s like, you know, me and [name] sitting on a fence, trying to make a dollar (laughter among group) of (inaudible) cents, you know, k-i-s-s-i-n-g and… But it’s, you know, inevitably it’s always us two (laugh)… I just thought that was kind of silly that you, you know, Chinese girl and a Korean guy, you know, just, obviously to them it made no difference, right? We’re just Asians.

(F)

Leo remembered, “So, you know, as typical Asian American, you get names like Chop Suey, Ching Chung, … you know, something like that. You know, and then they said, ‘does your father own Chinese restaurant?’ (laughter among group), you know, they said things like that” (F).

Phenotypic identification/biologically based conception of race. Participants reported a sense of identity based on phenotype and appeared to hold a biologically based conception of race. Steven referred to his host when he first arrived in the U.S. as being of “pure White race” (F). Referring to his own racial identity as immutable, he stated that were he to move to Africa, he would remain Asian because “my skin color is yellow, not black” (I). Jonathan noted, “I was affected by how other people perceived me and because my identity was so obviously different, based on my physicality” (I). Leo reported, (I) “And I have a choice to… you know... although my face is Asian, by my.... thinking... and what I do...with my life, it’s more in the mainstream,…” (I)
**Seen as racial/cultural stereotype vs. as individual.** Participants noted experiences of being seen as a racial or cultural stereotype. For example, Natalie noted the difference between how she would be viewed by Whites versus by her Korean friends:

> I think, uh, my colleagues and, um, (coughs) my, um, friends from back in school or college, I think they would see me as a very typical Korean girl, like, um, I can, you know, uh, very typical in a sense that I’m, um, physically, um, petite, um, went to med school, um, probably a good student, (Jonathan laughs) and just like, an-an-and, you know, cares about, you know, outfits, fashion...whereas my Korean American friends or Korean friends would see me more as an individual or as more of, as a person who has personality... (F)

**Seen as other/White normativity.** Participants shared experiences of being seen as other or experiences of White normativity. Michael recalled an incident in which a person directed a racist comment toward him and his friends and noted, “Like um, um, I, you know... even... late... night... in New York subway, people see me as a Asian American instead of, eh, something else” (I). His statement highlighted his experience of being othered based on his racial grouping. Leo stated, “Uh, of course I know that I’m different, but... um... knowing that I’m different, I kind of try to internalize that these are the things that I need to do to put myself out there in a positive light” (I). Leo’s need to portray himself positively implied that not only is he seen as “different” but that this difference is perceived as negative compared to the White norm. Steven reported, “And then they’d say, and they always distinguish, ‘But you Asians’” (I). He further noted, “If
someone, for example, a White person, uh, committed a crime, and had to show like 10 people for example, uh, a serial killer... it’s, it’s just a person who committed a crime in America. A person.” (I)

**Racism**

Racism can be defined as a system of domination in which “whites [sic] as a racial group secure supremacy in almost all facets of social life” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 140). Experiences of racism emerged in participants’ accounts; as with racialization experiences, participants did not always explicitly acknowledge these experiences as racism. The subthemes that comprised the theme of racism included (a) discrimination in the workplace, (b) need to prove self to Whites/seeking White validation, (c) belief/message that American = White, (d) violence against Asians, (e) marginalization of/microaggressions against Asians, (f) American affluence not accessible to people of color, (g) powerlessness.

**Discrimination in the workplace.** Participants described having been discriminated against in their work settings. Steven, in particular, recalled experiencing the glass ceiling:

Um, when it was time for promotion after a year or two later, you know on Wall Street, I got passed. I was so upset, ah, and I went to see my manager about what happened ’cause I was supposed to be, ah, promoted. He said, “well, you know, uh, you know, your English is good, but blah, blah, and blah, blah.” And then I realized one thing that, all the guys who got promoted was White. And then all the guys who were better than White people were Asian, or Chinese or Indian, got
all passed, including myself. That sort of ticked me off. And, the second time, I was supposed to go into an, I was supposed to be assigned to the room, not a cubicle, but a room. Again I got passed although my performance was always good. So I went to my manager again. “What happened? That room is supposed to be mine, but Kevin, who was White boy, got it. His performance was horrible,” I, at least, that’s what I thought. “What happened?” and he said, “Well, you know, blah-blah, he’s a, you know, blah, he’s blah, blah.” (F)

Later, Steven noted the fragility of employment for Asians:

2008 became my last, ah, year of my Wall Street career because the Wall Street got (inaudible) and crashed down and had to go. And so funny thing, again the funny thing is all the people who got laid off—60 people got laid off from my department—40, 48 people were minorities, (group member: mm-hm) including myself, all Asians, and only about 12 people were White. (F)

Need to prove self to Whites-seeking White validation. Participants described experiences of seeking White validation or feeling the need to prove themselves to Whites. Jonathan recalled, “And even... you know, as I think about like high school, I was dating mostly non-Koreans... and I was trying to figure out why that is. And I think it had to do with the fact that.... maybe I had to prove something? (laughs)”(I) When I followed up about the race of the “non-Korean women,” he acknowledged that they were mostly White. Jonathan also remembered a specific incident with a girl in high school:

I remember walking down the street and some guys were making, you know, some disparaging remarks, and I just started getting really mad, and she just
looked over and she said, ‘you know what, and he’s great,’ (laughs) an-and you
know, she just kind of walked off, and I thought ‘oh that’s a nice way to handle it’
(laughs). (F)

Leo recounted his need, as a child, to prove himself to Whites:

Um, I guess it was not until maybe middle school that I realized that…I’m gonna
be smarter than the White boys, be stronger than the White boys, and you know,
do well in school and at the s-same, at the same time, do well in sports. I guess to
be…I don’t know if the word’s respect, but they’ll know, they will know that
they’ll not tease me. (Michael: mm) So, I went through that process. I don’t know
that I was negotiating my Korean identity. I know I was different; but it, and then,
what I see is White people. I don’t think about the Korean side, I just know it’s
me against them. (F)

Belief/Message that American = White. Participants described the belief or
message that American is White, whether the participants appeared aware or unaware of
these beliefs or messages. For example, in recounting his experience of boarding the
plane that brought him to the U.S., Michael reported, “It was, uh, it was, no, no Korean.
Like it was just, just me and my mom (Jonathan: Oh), my aunt, and everyone is American.
Like it was the first time I seen that many White people at the same time” (F). His
statement implicitly equated Americans with White people. Steven’s message was more
explicit:

Uh, this country is still…very White, and I believe when they, when anybody says
American, it’s White, they’re referring to White. I don’t think they’re referring to
Asian, uh they’re referring to—maybe now it’s been such a long time since the slavery, the law has been, you know, has been abolished, maybe Black can be, I think they are, they can be referred to as American, but Asian, no. They’re—Asian is Asian. Not, not American. (I)

When asked about the message that American is White, Natalie made the following observation:

Um... it depends who you ask, if you... if you are asking... White people, it may be an un—it may be the un...conscious decision to say... that, but if you were to ask non-White people then it may the—it—they may say that yeah, White people—well, yeah. But then it may be the conscious decision to say that yeah, maybe they are... identifying America... as White country (I).

Violence against Asians. Participants noted incidents of violence against Asians. Leo remembered, “Um, one particular event that took place was some Korean bicyclist was beaten-beaten up by a cop, and nobody was there to...um, come forward to, uh...(Jonathan: intervene?) crying about injustice by these police, police brutality” (F).

Jonathan noted the following:

I think Vincent Chin was the first time (group member: oh, that’s right) that was even before, right?...when he got killed. Chinese guy getting beat up because they were—the auto workers were demonstrating against the (laughs) Japanese, beat up the wrong guy (laughs), (group member laughs) which is kinda comical in a way, uh, I mean tragically comical. I mean they couldn’t even pick the right guy, you know, um. (F)
Leo also noted the following incident:

…just yesterday I read, in New York Times, is the... Chinese American, he was born in the U.S., uh, was killed in the Afghanistan. And...they don’t know if it was suicidal, it was self-inflicted, or done by... enemy. And later on, after investigation, that the eight, U.S. GI’s, were uh...what’s that uh, prosecuted, they, you know, they were, they, and they—what’s the word they used? They were that, I guess, the, uh, he’s, he was a, involved with hazing? or... he was, uh harassed and...You know, because of him being Asian. Or Chinese. You know, they picked on him, and after awhile, he lost it and...I think he might have, you know... killed himself. (I)

**Marginalization of/microaggressions against Asians.** Participants also noted more subtle forms of racism against Asians. For example, Natalie noted the marginalization of Asians: “I don’t think they, there’s not even enough, um, conversation about like Asian group of people” (I). Her statement highlighted the status of Asians as an invisible minority group within the U.S. Michael recounted an incident of microaggression: “Umm, he was, uh, heavily drunk, I, I remember, and I, uh, he started making... some kind of racial joke to one of my friend” (I).

**American affluence not accessible to people of color.** A subtheme noted by only one of the participants but which nevertheless captured systemic racism was American affluence not being accessible to people of color. Jonathan, in whose account this subtheme emerged, did not appear to be conscious of this systemic issue: “I mean I actually believed, I remember this very clearly, I actually believed that the streets of
The discrepancy between his expectation and the reality of Jamaica, Queens, was accentuated by the fact that most of the residents of Jamaica, Queens, are people of color.

**Powerlessness.** The subtheme of powerlessness also emerged in only one participant’s account but was an important theme that spoke to the experience of racism. Michael made the following observation:

> some random person could say something to, uh, not just to...myself or, uh...maybe to a woman or a different, racial group. I-I-I see that...could happen, any time...and I'm not sure how to react---I mean 'cause that's so clearly...um, coming out of ignorance.... And, when, I mean, you know, just for example, like that, am I supposed to grab his number? And then call him next day... and... tell him that was wrong?"  

Michael’s question underscored his sense that he is unable to counteract the racism that he experienced.

**Racial Triangulation**

Participants spoke of experiences that reflected C.J. Kim’s (1999) concept of racial triangulation, namely, that there is a racial field within the U.S., in which Asian Americans are positioned as superior to Blacks while at the same time being excluded from the body politic as perpetual foreigners. The subthemes that comprised the theme of racial triangulation included (a) positing systemic racism as a Black/White problem, (b) questioning the location of Asians among racial field, (c) identification with Whites vs.
other people of color, (d) stereotyping other racial groups as foils to the “model minority” Asians, (e) perpetual foreigner status/need to assert American identity, (f) conditional acceptance of Asians by Whites, (g) model minority stereotype engendering hostility from other racial groups, (h) acceptance of and adherence to the model minority myth.

**Positing systemic racism as a Black/White problem.** During the focus group, participants related stories that posited systemic racism as a Black/White problem, thereby excluding Asians and other people of color from the problem of racism. This belief is evident in Jonathan’s narrative:

So we went, and it was very mixed ethnically, you know Blacks and Whites, all having picnic, barbeque, (group member: mm) everything was good. Except when they all sat down to eat, it just (group member laughs) it was shocking to me because there’s a big gazebo, and there are tables inside it, and then there are tables on the outside. All the White people are on the inside, and all the Black people are on the outside. And I said, “Tommy, come here,” I said, “you see that? Have you noticed that?” And he said, “no.” And it shocked me because (a) no one really noticed because it was just the way it was supposed to be in their minds; the Blacks accepted it as a fact, the Whites accepted it as a fact. What’s the problem, right? So, it took someone from the outside going, that’s something strange going on here, right? And so, that’s the first time I thought, man this is really deeply ingrained (laughs) (group member: mm), you know so deeply ingrained that it just becomes a matter of fact, just the way it is. And now that’s when I thought, now that’s dangerous. (laughs) … I mean that to me is like the
epitome of systemic racism. (F)

**Questioning location of Asians among racial field.** The narrative of racism as a Black/White problem raised the issue of where Asians were located in this racial field. This questioning and the implicit denial of Asians’ role in Black/White dynamics can be seen in the following exchange:

Michael: Where’d you end up sitting? Middle [of Blacks and Whites]?

Jonathan: I think I sat with [my White CEO friend] only because I had no choice, but, yeah. It would have been weird for me to go, you know, I’m going to make a statement (laughs) (group laughs)

Michael: right (laughs)

Jonathan: But that’s a good question, you know? Like if they weren’t there, where would I sit? (laughs) (F)

**Identification with Whites versus other people of color.** Participants appeared to subtly identify with Whites versus other people of color, which may be seen as one way in which racial triangulation occurs. That is, Asians are treated as the model minority and therefore more acceptable to Whites than other people of color. Michael communicated this identification in the following way:

Um... like I said, during the group meeting, I mean... years before, like, 15 or 17 years or, ago, I, I had a lot of interaction with like um, Blacks and Hispanics and other racial groups, but ever since then... ... in... the institution where I was surrounded by more White people than, I guess, than —and Asian people?… So... (pause) I guess I was more, uh, comfortable that way. (I)
Stereotyping other racial groups as foils to the “model minority” Asians.

Participants’ narratives included stereotypes about other racial groups, which served as foils to the “model minority” status of Asians. Steven made the following statement:

Uhhh, well it’s uh, it’s uh, somewhat stereotypical I believe and just somewhat very statistical, uh, but Blacks, yeah, commit crimes more often than Asians do, Asians do. Uhhh.... I think generally it’s true, uh, but I didn’t look at....(pause) I didn’t really see the statistics to really... evidently say that’s true. But... in general, I also do feel, I think that you know, Asians are hardworking people, it’s stereotypical, stereotypical, but still I think it’s true. (I)

Michael asserted, “Most of the, the group of people are different. Ah, I used to work at, uh, very Black, um, South Chicago, 92nd Street, where I got robbed five times. (group member laughs) Uh, they had no idea about, or no interest about, color or…they just stereotyping immediately” (F).

Steven remembered his community service experience in the following account:

And [a Korean American animal controller] was sort of, he probably look at me as a, very ashamed, probably, he you know, there’s always uh Black kids there, there were a lot of Spanish kids there, a lot of, you know, other, you know, some White kids there, but not Asian because Asians don’t commit a crime that, you know, when you’re seventeen or eighteen. (F)

Natalie described White people’s perception of Koreans in the following way:

they don’t really look down upon, or-or they don’t really view Koreans as like minority who need help or who need, uh, who’s gonna feed off of, um, social
security or Medicaid necessarily. So, I think, um, there’s a lot of, um, um, well, at least, how-how I feel about it is, I think there’s a lot of, um, positive opinions, um, about Korean people, and, um, I think it’s becoming more positive. (F)

Natalie’s statement highlighted how Asians are triangulated in the racial field, implying that other people of color are the ones that “feed off of” welfare in contrast to the model minority Koreans.

**Perpetual foreigner status/need to assert American identity.** Participants’ accounts belied their status as perpetual foreigners and their need to assert their American identity in reaction to this status. Leo, when asked about his Korean identity, stated, “I mean, um, we could flip the question around and, ‘what makes you, m-American or more American than Korean?’ … so basically, let’s ask ourselves, ‘How American are we?’” (I) His question underscored his need to emphasize his American identity, a common reaction to the perpetual foreigner status ascribed to Asians by White Americans.

Jonathan, in describing his Korean American wife, stated, “Grew up in Ohio. (laughs)” (I) Jonathan’s statement is also the typical response to White Americans’ proverbial question to Asians, i.e., “where are you from?” Steven noted the following:

…maybe now it's been such a long time since the slavery, the law has been, you know, abolished, maybe Black can be, I think they are, they can be referred to as American, but Asian, no. They're…Asian is Asian. Not, not American. (I)

All of these narratives highlighted how Asians are precluded from full acceptance as legitimate members of American society. Taken together with the other subthemes, it became apparent the ways in which Asians are triangulated by Whites by being pitted
against other people of color as the model minority and yet not being fully accepted as American.

**Conditional acceptance of Asians by Whites.** One participant described the conditional acceptance of Asians by Whites. Steven, for example, made the following assertion:

Yeah, I think that, um, that you’re being, you’re being viewed by White people as Asian or, whether you’re accepted to their culture or not, I think it depends on a lot of things, and one...two things that I can think of is like, uh, you’ve said, where you work, I mean the type of place you work. If you are working in a very diverse area or work environment, I think you are, you can be easily accepted (group member: mm) as Asian, and that’s okay. (Michael: mm) If you are working in a financial environment, you better be White (Michael clears throat). Uh, you can be Asian, that’s okay, but you will always be a second-class. They don’t say it; they absolutely don’t say it because it’s against the law. But it’s sort of a given. (F)

**Model minority stereotype engendering hostility from other racial groups.**

Another minor subtheme was the experience of hostility from other racial groups due to the model minority stereotype. Steven noted:

Um... and... because of the behavior, the Asian behavior, we lack... to care for other people who are not better off than us. We are always... doing better and better, in the future. Uh, because of it I think the hostility towards Asians comes because of it. White people believe that we are just Asian Jews, uhhh, you know
the Black people believe that we’re stealing their money, um, legally, because they buy our products and we just sell them somehow, as much as Spanish people could believe that we’re just uh, uh, what, we’re people who only know about money. (I)

**Acceptance of and adherence to the model minority myth.** It appeared that most of the participants not only accepted but also adhered to the myth of the model minority. Michael made the following statement:

> Um, you just tend, you know, there’s a expectation from family members, other people that, need to work hard, better than much—80 hours a week or 120 hours a week, so end up working a lot more than average people should do. But that becomes very normal, especially for myself. (F)

Michael also appeared to emphasize the positive influence of the model minority stereotype:

> I don't want to stereotype anyone, but, even myself, because, you know…working hard, and doing extra work, and just trying to…do best, and…keep up to, uh, support my family, and not giving up on it, I-I think that discipline itself, actually, that is not coming from us individual but there's, there's ongoing, force behind it saying, well, you're, you're the Korean, you're the Asian, you know, this is how you're raised, and I-I think that is definitely there. … definitely gave me uh, um, a strong will, and a very strong desire to... um... (pause) person to... be more responsible, and you know, I guess being a Korean American, like I said, not being stereotyping, but, gave me that sort of background to be, um, work harder,
and, you know... um...(pause) you know, one of those typical things, and I, I’m, definitely becoming like that and identifying... more towards there. (I)

Others, such as Natalie, appeared to endorse the stereotype while simultaneously distancing from it:

It’s, it’s, I don’t take those things seriously, although I know there is, I mean, d-probably I do have some sort of, to a certain degree, do have those, um, stereotypes in my mind about like a certain group of people, um, including our own, like you know, I’m Korean American, population, Asian people, ‘cause, because, like I said, I do agree, to a certain extent. (I)

**Color-Blind Ideology**

Color-blind ideology refers to the hegemonic ideology within the U.S. around race, which perpetuates the myth that race does not matter and minimizes the differential realities for people of color versus Whites (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, Browne, 2000). Participants uniformly manifested adherence to this color-blind ideology. Various subthemes became apparent that captured this ideology, including (a) assimilation held as ideal, (b) minimization/denial of racialization, (c) emphasizing ethnic diversity among Whites as a means to avoid talking about race, (d) assumption of level playing field, (e) colorblindness posited as ideal, (f) positing connection to all human beings regardless of race.

**Assimilation held as ideal.** Many participants appeared to hold assimilation into White American culture and the loss of ethnic identity as the ideal. Jonathan stated, “And the hope is there would come a time when that self-identification of hyphenated
American is not necessary” (F). In reflecting on the focus group experience, Michael noted in his individual interview, “…we're not…just being isolated, as, because we're an ethnic group, but, you know, we're, um, assimilated into the society. So, that was also a positive, uh, thing that I came out with” (I). At the same time, he remarked on Steven’s negative stance toward White Americans: “I felt that…if that's the case then, he--like he said, maybe he should---really need to go back [to Korea]”(I). Leo reported, “When you would see, non-Korean person, you know how to act with, you know, in the certain way that, you know, that Korean, Korean-ness doesn’t come out”(I). This statement posited the importance of assimilating to White American culture.

Minimization/denial of racialization. Most participants minimized or denied the existence of racialization. Leo, in the following statement in which he asserted his American identity, denied that that his experience was racialized:

On, holidays, we celebrate Christmas. Thanksgiving, we, I-I watch Superbowl, and when the, NCAA March Madness comes out, I watch college basketball. I get at the World Series, (laughs) in the, in the fall. Um... and, and, at the same time, as I’m, as any mainstream, you know, during the summertime or during the holidays, we visit, we get to travel, you know, around the country and... experience all different, um, cultures of, uh, you know, all different types of food... and, you know, Southern culture... uh, Western culture... uh, L.A. culture, whatever it is, I mean... whi-while... you could be American, at the same time you don’t have to be White to experience all of that. (I)

Leo also made the following assertion:
See the White, when you say Whites, it’s very broad. And as she [Natalie] pointed out, as you get to know the person or you spend time with them, their Whiteness goes. I know him as Jim, John, Paul. And to me, I don’t really consciously think about how my boss views me. As long as I do my work, then does he distinguish between is he Korean or is he American? I don’t think he does that, and neither do I. (F)

Michael noted, “I’d never thought of the, you know, racial tension or….looking at, even myself as a Korean American, living in, White America in a way?” (I)

Emphasizing ethnic diversity among Whites to avoid talking about race.

Participants appeared to be uncomfortable with acknowledging race, especially when it came to White people, and instead, emphasized the ethnic diversity among Whites. Leo stated, “You know with the, Hispanics or… Afro-Americans, White people, and, when you say ‘White people,’ there’s, you know, you could think of the Italians, Irish, German,...Jewish, and so and so”(I) The discomfort with talking about race can be seen in the following exchange:

Interviewer: When you say non-Koreans, are you talking about White women?
Jonathan: …Yeah! I think a l--mostly…um… W--I mean, not, yeah, I mean…, diff…different ethnicities but….mostly Caucasian or, you know, some mix thereof.
(I)

Assumption of a level playing field. Another subtheme that emerged in the participants’ accounts was the assumption of a level playing field. Natalie stated, “I don’t think our system is…made…in a way …um…it would…favor…one race or…the
other”(I). She went on to state:

Because I don’t really f—(long pause) I mean I can’t really think of an example where systemically, while in the state like at school or at um, um, in government setting where they would, um, (pause) identify as Korean or Asian group as... like, who, who don’t need as much support or who, um, (long pause) mmm....(long pause) yeah, or who would, uh, who would actively say, uh, these groups of people are like the, um, descendents of the immigrants, whatnot, I don’t think it’s, um, encouraged to ... say, talk that way—. (I)

**Colorblindness posited as ideal.** Most participants posited colorblindness as ideal. Natalie asserted, “Um, it’s…I think it, i-it, if you, if you are culturally, um, um, or if you are just a mature person yourself individually, you will see other people as a person...not a, not a…Indian, or you’re brown, you’re yellow, you’re White, uh, Black, you know”(F). Steven stated, “Uh—Let it go. And, live my life as an individual, not, not so much as an Asian...who... gets... the um certain... stupid words from White Americans”(I).

**Positing connection to all human beings regardless of race.** Participants also manifested a humanistic ideology, positing a connection to all human beings regardless of race. Leo made the following statement:

And I cry when people in Haiti, uh, (laughs) lot of people died in Haiti, and then even in Japan, when the whole country got, you know, covered by tsunami. And it’s, you know, they’re playing the footage over and over and over again, and they did the interview with people, your heart, your heart goes out to any human being.
was hurt. (F)

Natalie asserted, “I want to do good for people in America, people in Korea, people in Africa, like, ... it’s like the global issue … that I focus, not just my back, my country back in Korea versus here”(F).

**Individualistic Ideology**

A common theme among participants was the ideology of individualism. That is, participants appeared to have internalized the belief that contextual factors, such as culture, racism, and history did not influence their lives because it is the individual that matters. This individualistic ideology was manifested in the following subthemes: (a) wanting to be seen as an individual, (b) identity negotiation as a solely individual process, (c) decontextualized view of culture, (d) view of history as disconnected from individual reality, (e) view of racism/racial identity as disconnected from individual, daily reality, (f) positing individualistic solution to systemic problem, (g) positing systemic issue as individual issue.

**Wanting to be seen as an individual.** Natalie expressed the desire to be seen as an individual rather than be identified by the racial or cultural group. She distanced herself from the achievements of other Koreans, describing her reasoning this way: “Maybe that’s what it is. If I succeed, I’m, I succeeded because I am, I did well, not, I’m, it’s not particularly anything to wow about because I’m a minority and then I succeeded”(F).

**Identity negotiation as a purely individual process.** Participants appeared to view their identity negotiation as a purely individual process, unaffected by contextual
factors. Leo stated, “I think it’s, uh, from—personally for me was, uh, um, upbringing, upbringing, and then, I guess, mmm, my formative years [that affects my identity]”(I). Natalie explained, “It’s because it’s, it’s, it’s probably because this is my conscious decision, my personal decision, to call myself one or the other, as opposed to other people calling me”(I). Jonathan reported, “I actually think that how Korea does affects how I feel in terms of how proud I am and not. But that doesn’t affect how I feel about myself”(F).

**Decontextualized view of culture.** Along the same lines of an individualistic view of identity negotiation, participants also appeared to have a decontextualized view of culture. Jonathan noted the following:

So, you know, it’s, it’s, I think learning to... take... all the good that you can from your background and culture, and... incorporating it into who you are today... and making it, really owning that, I think is, it’s really, is a struggle and..... the cult—the status of the mother country, at this particular juncture, would not impact that at all. (I)

His assertion implied that culture can be decontextualized from power dynamics and that one can simply pick and choose what one wants to incorporate from one’s culture and be immune to the context of how the characteristics of a culture can be defined in the context of imperialism.

Jonathan later made the following statement:

And you either have choice of accepting, or not. (pause) And. You know. And because, I’ve chosen to accept my, background, and, fully embrace myself... and
all that I am, I think... that would not affect it one way or the other. It’s not the fact that Korea is such an economic power or whatever. (I)

View of history as disconnected from individual reality. Participants also held a view of history as disconnected from individual reality. When asked about the influence of U.S. intervention after the Korean War, Natalie stated, “I don’t think that affects our... (pause) daily identity in any way. Um... but, however, just because things of that nature happened so long ago ... It’s just...kind of is, for me, it’s just sort of a piece of history that happened”(I). In response to the same question (how the U.S. intervention in Korea affected his sense of identity), Jonathan replied, “Well, I’m not, I’m not certain, actually, um, because it was such a different time, different place... in history”(I). Leo asserted, “That, that doesn’t really... what’s it called? (pause) help me to become better Ameri- better, help me to become more American? No, ... I think...that there was what happened in the past...”(I)

View of racism/racial identity as disconnected from individual, daily reality.
In a similar vein, participants appeared to view racism as disconnected from their daily reality. Steven stated, “…I think everybody sort of, uh, ignoring their ignorances, and live as an individual in America…” Leo echoed a similar sentiment:

It doesn’t really...(very long pause) how I identify myself in that sense, I, I really don’t? ’Cause I’m forth—I’m busy worrying about, hhh, not worrying about, I’m busy... in trying, trying to do whole, how, you know, live out my life? (laughs)(I) Leo also added, “I don’t really feel... most of us—I mean, to me, I don’t spend... thinking about (laugh) ... ‘cause I... got to, you know, wake up, go to work... and then, you know,
do my thing”(I).

**Positing individualistic solution to systemic problem.** Many of the participants also posited an individualistic solution to systemic problems, like racism. Leo stated, “at the same time... um... (pause) I know sometimes you try to take a higher road”(I).

Jonathan suggested the following:

I suppose you could have more, um... .... education or... you know... but... I guess it-it really has to be just, encounters with people, you know, in order to overcome. It, it’s so much more difficult to be... mean and... generalizing, when you know people, specifically. You know, it’s one thing to say, like, a gay person, you know, you might be against the whole homosexuality thing, but when you get to know somebody, it’s just, becomes a little bit more difficult when there’s a name to the face. (I)

Jonathan’s solution was an interpersonal one, with the implication that were people only to take the time to get to know each other, the problem of racism might be solved.

**Positing systemic issue as individual issue.** Participants also posited systemic issues as individualistic issues. Leo stated, “And when you’re poor, and, you know, hey, do I have a choice of being, staying poor, or, work hard to get out of poverty? So there is a choice involved here”(I). Michael explained that he sees racism as a problem of individual ignorance:

Like even in subway you can see some drunken people... or ah... some random person could say something to, uh, not just to... myself or uh... maybe to a woman or a different, racial group, I-I-I see that... could happen, any time... and I’m not
sure how to react—I mean ‘cause that’s so clearly... um, coming out of ignorance, and... like I said, even three of us could not... change someone’s mind, if he was already... way too drunk.(I)

False Consciousness

False Consciousness, i.e., oppressive beliefs that serve to maintain the power differentials in the current system (Jost, 1995), emerged as a major theme in participants’ accounts. This theme was manifested in several subthemes, including (a) absolving Whites of role in racism, (b) internalized stereotypes/internalized racism, (c) minimization/denial of racism, (d) minimizing pain/impact of racism, (e) distancing from others’ racism experiences (f) positing choice in racism encounter, (g) holding Korean Americans/Asian Americans responsible for racism experience, (h) need to posit optimism about racism/racialization/power dynamics, (i) denying impact of racism on self-identity, (j) distancing from racism by locating racism outside of place of residence.

Absolving Whites of their role in racism. Illustrative of absolving White people of their role in racism, Steven reported, “It [racism] was my personal problem, it was my family's problem, it was--it has nothing to do with the White Americans”(I). While recounting his encounter with a White American who made a racial joke to him and his friends, Michael made the following statement:

…in this instance, he was White, … but I can clearly see that instance could be, uh, Korean… I mean the person could easily be Black or Hispanic or…do you see where I'm going with this? Like, clearly, it wasn't who's saying it, but it was what they were looking at was a Korean American. (I)
Leo, in the following exchange, made a somewhat contradictory statement:

Leo: Just yesterday I read, in New York Times, is the... Chinese American, he was born in the U.S., uh, was killed in the Afghanistan. And...they don’t know if it was suicidal, it was self-inflicted, or done by... enemy. And later on, after investigation, that the eight, U.S. GI’s, were uh...what’s that uh, prosecuted, they, you know, they were, they, and they—what’s the word they used? They were that, I guess, the, uh, he’s, he was a, involved with hazing? or... he was, uh harassed and... [Interviewer: Hmm]

Leo: You know, because of him being Asian. Or Chinese. You know, they picked on him, and after a while, he lost it and...I think he might have, you know... killed himself. [Interviewer: Hmm]

Leo: That it—things like that, it—when you read it, you know, you get mad about it.

Interviewer: So that, I mean, and incidents like that does sound like there are certain parts or certain, um, you know parts of... the U.S. or certain cultures within the U.S. that does still see American as being White. I mean it sounds like, even though that person was Chinese American, he was seen as not American, in, in the full sense of the word.

Leo: Yes, if it were the perpetrators are White, to say that, you know, generally said, this is White... picking on... an Asian. Um... now... this is....(pause) you need to analyze, is the thing... race-based? Or... just these people are ignorant? Or... these people are...just, bad people.. bullely, bluey...bullying... bullying –
internalized stereotypes/racism. Participants’ narratives reflected the theme of internalized racism and stereotypes. Jonathan reported the following:

Um... and I think even then though I felt... like...(pause) [the mostly White women I dated] were, I think, able to love me for what I was, which speaks very highly (laughs) about them. Unfortunately, I don’t know if that was the case with me. Despite their ability to do that, I wasn’t sure if I was able to do that, meaning, love myself. (I)

Steven made the following statement:

I think because we work hard and we love money and um and we love, we value rich, and you know, becoming rich, um, in this country, and uh—Asians who live in America always do more than other countries, or other race, to have a better life. I think it’s just a general, uh, uh, it’s generally true, very very true. Um... and... because of the behavior, the Asian behavior, we lack... to care for other people who are not better off than us. ... that, how does that impact my identity as Asian. Well, um, feel a little shameful, um... about me being Korean or Asian (pause) ... and to feel that when... the stereotypical belief that I am just one of them... (pause) and... uh... one of the Asians who you know knows only the monetary value of
everything and everything is about money. (I)

Minimization/denial of racism. Participants appeared to minimize or deny the existence of racism. Michael, in describing an encounter in which a racial joke was directed against him, stated, “…this random thing happened”(I). Natalie denied the existence of systemic racism, stating, “I don’t think our system is... made... in a way that... um... it would... favor... one race or... the other.... but I think it’s, um, made in a way that it could, um, enhance... discrepancies between like socioeconomic classes... but not necessarily like ethnic groups”(I).

Minimizing pain/impact of racism. Participants also minimized the pain and impact of racism. Jonathan stated the following:

…only because I personally have not experienced ... that type of violence, other than people, you know, screaming out obscenities and, you know, racial slurs, which, and, I mean I guess it is violence, but I mean I don’t really see that as a physical harm to me, right, I mean other than raising my blood pressure by twenty points (laughs) (group member laughs), and wanting to go hit something, you know, but that’s really, you could control that, it’s you, you know. (F)

Steven reported, “…while I was (inaudible) those ignorance and, and getting, getting, you know, when they yell at some, some, something stupid, I always felt that it was maybe, maybe I took it personal”(I). Natalie contended, “Ohh... well... it sucks when things like that happen [i.e., people make racist remarks], but, and it is, um...(pause) but it is what it is”(I). Jonathan often laughed in the focus group and individual interview to possibly minimize the pain of racism: “I guess if you’re Black, you have a better chance of, you
know, (laughs) being recognized as American ‘cause you’ve been here so long, you know? (laughs)”(I)

**Distancing from others’ racist experiences.** Participants not only minimized the impact of their own racism experiences but also used various strategies to distance from others’ racist experiences. Michael responded to Steven’s anger at his racist experiences by stating, “And I-I just…wonder how one person can have such a…a…negative reaction towards White--thing, and live, live that way, way for a long time, so…I guess it's just two different pers--person though”(I). Jonathan laughed, which seemed to help him distance from Steven’s pain: “I found it very interesting that, uh, uh, especially with, uh, with one of the guys there, who had a very, uh, different perspe—uh, experi—life experience than me, so (laughs)”(I).

**Positing choice in racism encounter.** Another way in which participants denied systemic racism was to posit a choice in the experience of racism. Jonathan made the following statement:

…because I don’t want to expose myself to potentially, uh, ignorant, uh, ignorance that would just piss me off (laughs). You know, and I don’t want to spend my energy being upset or having to acculturate them because that’s not really my job (laughs). So I choose to surround myself peop-with people who are mature. (F)

Michael asserted, “I-there’s a choice. You don’t have to deal with that. You don’t have to waste your energy on these people”(F). Similarly, Leo suggested, “I mean, I think because you live, I live, in a—this free country, and I have a choice”(I).
Holding Korean Americans/Asian Americans responsible for racist experiences. One participant appeared to hold Korean Americans responsible for their own racist experiences. Leo posited the following:

…and (group member: mm) I realized how sad that, that Korean community is that, while we’re here making money, but when it comes to political aspect, they don’t do anything, and I have to—I have to say if you don’t get in-involved with politics, okay, and you get what you deserve (group member coughs). (F)

Leo also stated, “We haven’t really done much to help ourselves or help Korea to, you know, be... you know, move up in the status, you know, in a more positive light”(I).

Need to posit optimism about racism/racialization. Many of the participants’ accounts belied the need to posit an optimistic outlook on racism and racialization. This optimism did not appear to be grounded in actual facts that supported their optimism but rather appeared to be a way to avoid fully acknowledging racism and racialization. Leo stated, “…when I look at things in U.S. or in Korea or at workplace or any other place, there’s both good and bad, in ev—in anything”(I). The following statement by Michael illustrates the contradiction between his posited optimism and perceived reality:

Um... I-I think, you know, definitely.... things are changing, like—even after we talked, you know, what happened with the Euro and Europe and you know, the U.S. politic is changing. It’s shaping up, you know, the FDA towards, uh, Korea. The trade is, the, you know, the way the trade is written is very different than my....how the world should be... So I actually read about that a little more...that it could be...um, (pause) you know that, it was uh, it was pretty obvious... or uh,
coming from U.S. to Korea. And I can see, you know, how minority places like, you know, there’s a—strong female in Europe, and you know, Black man in the U.S. leading the politics, and economics, so I see this as a ch--big change and I see my daughter, and my nephews, uh, may have a better chance... I’m not sure if that’s the right word... (I)

Michael’s realization that unequal power dynamics is impacting how the trade agreement is written abruptly segued into optimism about the future.

**Denying impact of racism on self-identity.** Participants denied the impact of racism on their identity. Leo offered, “Um... To tell you the truth, almost every ethnic group has some sort of stereotype. Sometimes you have to laugh about it”(I). Natalie, in talking about the impact of the model minority stereotype, stated, “Um... (pause) It certainly...(pause) I mean, because it’s not... affecting me negatively, I guess you can say it affects me? But it doesn’t affect me positively either. It doesn’t … enhance my identity as a Korean American either”(I).

**Distancing from racism by locating racism outside of place of residence.** One strategy used by participants to distance themselves from racism was to locate racism outside their place of residence. Leo made the following statement:

And...I know those people who are from very secluded area, where there’s no Asians, and they have this scar from, you know, growing up through racism, and to this day, wh-um...you know, they have certain perspective, which, that I never experienced. (I)

Jonathan echoed this sentiment:
Yeah... it’s, um, (long pause) (laughs) to some degree it’s, um, it’s kind of... hard to say...because... (pause) you know, I’ve consciously lived.... in New York, specifically, aware that... there are other parts of the country where... people may not be as... accepting... or... as... open minded, perhaps. (I)

Michael noted, “And you know how Jonathan was saying he would not ever go back to um Alabama or Texas or the South because... he would not feel comfortable? I guess I was doing the same thing”(I). It appeared that by locating racism elsewhere, participants were denying that racism was a problem for all Americans and thereby not a problem to be concerned about.

**Critical Consciousness**

While manifesting a false consciousness, participants simultaneously belied a critical consciousness about racism and power dynamics in their accounts. This critical consciousness could be seen in several subthemes, including (a) asserting the need for political action to counter unequal power dynamics, (b) Korean identification in response to power dynamics/racism, (c) offering a critical understanding of history, (d) acknowledgment/awareness of racism/power dynamics, (e) focus group facilitating new consciousness.

**Asserting the need for political action to counter power dynamics.**

Participants asserted the need for political action to counter the power differentials. Leo asserted the following:

When... a politician, or, when somebody, in the official position, uhhh... what others say, any acts, any—any legislation, that is... violating someone’s, uh, you
know, human rights or some sort of, uh, uh, there’s no equality, I mean, t-taking away, you know, equality, um... that’s when you have to mobilize. (I)
Michael stated, “So... maybe that’s another thing we need to be more politically involved in, you know... influence, you know, education and... prevention planning... or, I-I’m pretty sure there’s a lot more we can do but right now we’re not doing it enough I think”(I). He went on to state, “”if we, we can build, uh, more political power within ourselves, maybe there's something that we could do...more to...also, not just benefit Korea...in Asia, but also benefit Korean Americans, like...uh...my daughter's generation”(I).

**Korean identification in response to power dynamics/racism.** Participants reported identifying more strongly as Korean/Korean American in response to power dynamics or racism experiences. Thus, the experience of power dynamics appeared to have consolidated their identity as a means of self-empowerment. Leo noted, “at the same time, I root for Korea (laugh) in, in any way I can”(I). Steven reported, “Uh, (inaudible) well, you know, I’ll take, I’ll take, their.... perception and... I will be Asian. I will not be American. … Um...people who...believe America is a liberator, I feel more strongly about my Korean identity”(I).

**Offering a critical understanding of history.** Participants offered a critical understanding of history. Jonathan made the following statement about the myth of the model minority:

You know, when we first came to the States in late 1800’s and 1900’s and, you know, most of that happening between 1903 and 1905, um, most of the people
that came, um, were (pause), there’s a description that, uh, Ahn Chang Ho, you
know, he’s the, one of the patriots, so he was in a story about him, and one of the
stories is, you know, how he found, uh, the Korean community, and many of them
were living in a very, um, impoverished condition. But also, uh, they were kind of
living in a, very much of a, ghetto...back then. (I)

Jonathan also made the following statement about U.S. interests affecting Korean and
Korean American history:

Um, from a negative standpoint, you know, uh, uh, the whole division of 38th
parallel and the his—you know, the, uh... really the U.S. is really looking out for
its own interests. I mean even, going back to the earliest immigration, it
happened because U.S. needed laborers...outside of... unionizing Japanese and
Chinese who’d been here prior to, to Koreans... So... institutionally, there’ve been,
um, movements, to, bring Koreans over. (I)

Steven spoke about the need for a critical understanding of the U.S. intervention in
Korea:

But I do have a negative um, impact, from the peo—from the Korean people
who... just blindly believe that America was liberator…(pause) Not, not, not
because... you know, not, not towards America but in that, uh I mean it’s the
people and I –I have a problem with these people…I believe that they should,
they should ah, (sigh) think more clearly, that they should think or they should
study more history--...the right history. The correct history, not the history that,
the government made up…or, the educational center made up by political power
or anything, I just--they should know…um, the truth, really. And they shouldn’t just .... (sigh)... that they shouldn’t just believe that America was liberator, or they shouldn’t really blindly hate America, ah... for what they did politically, for their best (inaudible). I sort of have a problem with those people, not America. (I)

**Acknowledgment/awareness of racism/power dynamics.** Participants, implicitly or explicitly acknowledged the existence of racism and power dynamics. Leo asserted the following:

> And right now, Asian Americans and Korean Americans don’t, don’t have, have very minimal power. That, that limited pie, the pie chart that we have. W-mostly, probably controlled by the Whites, mostly, some, you know, very small Blacks, and some, very small Hispanics and, maybe v-v-very small Asian Americans. (I)

Michael made the following observation:

> …the trade is, the, you know, the way the trade is written is very different than my…how the world should be… So, I actually read about that a little more…that it could be…um…(pause) you know, that it was, uh, it was pretty obvious…or, uh, coming from U.S. to Korea. (I)

Steven showed an awareness of racism as a systemic issue:

> Well it’s, it is, it is a systems... systematic issue because I believe that the way the newspaper or the media, or even in, you know, in uh, in the corporation... (pause) they separ—they, they do, uh, distinguish us as a someone else, not American. (I)

**Focus group facilitated new consciousness.** In the individual interviews,
participants reported that the focus group had facilitated a new consciousness around issues of race and power. Michael stated the following:

That was definitely awakening, for me, and just looking at it differently...I actually never thought (pause) different issues that have to relate back to the racial issues because I--I just didn't feel that way, but...you know, maybe...you know, I--maybe should have have a second thought about some things. (I)

He also went on to state, “Yeah, I, uh, definitely, just, just talking to these people, and talking to you, and just, you know...just...e-even...this, there, there were something that I already...was doing, but I just didn't see that in that perspective, but...now it, this is a little bit more clear”(I).

Jonathan reported, “I was just thinking about that, and reflecting on it, and, and, then kind of thinking, ‘Hmm. If more of us knew about that kind of, uh, uh, experience, I wonder if that would have affected, you know, how we feel about ourselves”(I).

**U.S. Imperialism/Colonial Mentality**

Participants made various statements that belied a colonial mentality, i.e., internalized oppression in the context of colonization (Pieterse et al., 2011), and spoke of the presence of U.S. imperialism. The following subthemes comprised the theme of U.S. imperialism/colonial mentality: (a) U.S. as liberator/savior, (b) American superiority, (c) Korean inferiority, (d) U.S. citizenship/English fluency privileged in Korea, (e) denial of Korean identity/need to identify as American, (f) Koreans associated with U.S. intervention, (g) placing responsibility for U.S. imperialism on Korea, (h) Korea’s status elevating Korean American identity, (i) implicit acknowledgment and acceptance of U.S.
imperialism, (j) discomfort with negative stance toward the U.S./avoiding blaming the U.S., (k) ideology of social Darwinism.

**U.S. as liberator/savior.** One participant clearly voiced the theme of U.S. as the liberator/savior of Korea. Leo stated, “when North invaded, U.S. did come and liberated Korea from the northern, from the North Koreans”(I). He also stated the following:

Think about we’re the beneficiaries of U.S. involvement in Korea. For example, U.S. bombed Japan. And what happened? That brought independence to Korea. Okay, if the U.S. not defeat Japanese, all of us either speaking Japanese or would not be here today. And, Korean War. I know that, you know, Stalin and, uh, Roosevelt and Truman split the country. However, McArthur came and saved Korea. (F)

**American superiority.** Participants offered various iterations of the theme of American superiority. For example, Natalie posited the U.S. as more diverse than Korea:

Like, I would, you know, go, you know, trick-or-treating on Halloween, you know, um, it was something different, you know, I—um, it was just a lot more, um, everybody looked different, everybody lived differently, um, um, everybody’s, like, each house looked different, and it—it’s not like, you know, like, the condos that, um, everybody lives in Korea. (F)

Jonathan suggested that the U.S. was not only more diverse but also more progressive, stating, “But for me.... I still feel like it’s probably the most... progressive nation in the world, in terms of .... um... being open and accep-accepting to other, uh, races and ethnicities and such”(I). Leo linked American cuisine to sophistication, reporting, “And
also, what I remember is, like Myongdong or, you know, fancy places in Seoul, we would eat American foods”(I). Steven remembered his first encounter with the U.S. in the following way:

Alexandria, that I got there, it was heavenly-like because there was, uh, not many apartments, but all the small house with the all their backyards with some people have the swimming pool there. And all, everybody drives around in Volvo or very nice cars. (F)

Natalie’s account of how her mother phrased the question of moving to the U.S. is telling:

My mom was, uh, like, “so, do you wanna,” um, wh-what was the phrase that she said, um, sh-she said something like, “jom, jom deo keunmulehseo norabolae?” Like, meaning like, do you want to experience something different, like you wanna experience something, uh, do you wanna have more chances for yourself, kinda. (F)

(The literal translation of Natalie’s mother’s Korean expression is “Would you like to play in bigger waters?”)

**Korean inferiority.** In contrast to the theme of American superiority, participants described Korean inferiority. Michael made the following statement:

Um, during the time, there was, ah, I had an encounter with a-- three different occasions working with the Korean government... the people from K-Korea are very much... um... (pause) um, um, I-I don’t wanna—sorta—wanna say the bad... things about them, but, they were not willing to...(pause) not working in a proper
Natalie voiced her negative perception of Korea’s homogeneity:

…well, even before entertaining the idea of moving to the States, I was like, you know, everybody’s, everyone looks the same here, everybody’s doing the same thing here, everybody knew the direction here, you know, all the kids here around me will sell their soul to get into a good school in Korea, you know, that kind of thing really, like, kind of, like, irked me kinda, so… (F)

Leo stated, “…you know Korea’s catching up. Um... they still need catching up to do”(I).

Jonathan implicitly reported his perception of Korea as naïve/unsophisticated by reporting on his relationship with a Korean woman:

but just going back [to Korea] that first time, and then coming back, actually going there, and then coming back, really, (Michael: right) kind of helped my perceptions a lot because I’ll—I’ll use an example of this: I met a girl, (group member laughs) and it was the most chaste relationship we ever had. I think I barely held her hand, right? But, I mean, she was so sweet and so nice and, and then, you know, we had a nice time, and then, when I left, I came back, and she wrote me letters! I mean beautiful letters, and after a while, it (laughs) got a little tiring, to be honest (laugh), you know? (F)

**U.S. citizenship/English fluency privileged in Korea.** Participants’ accounts reflected the privilege associated with U.S. citizenship and English fluency in Korea. For example, Steven noted his own status as an American citizen in Korea:

Back then, 1992, American, having American citizenship was pretty, pretty, uh,
what, (group member says something inaudible) uh, pretty odd thing, it was pretty, you know, privileged thing because not many people had American…not many people was born in America. (F)

Jonathan stated, “So, … I went back [to Korea] and through friends, I found some kids to tutor, you know, English, and I got to stay at their house and all that”(F).

Denial of Korean identity/need to identify as American. Steven voiced his previous denial of Korean identity and his need to identify as American:

Okay. There is no particular turning point or at any point I start believing that I am Korean. I was American. I came here 1992. I spoke no word of English. Uh, but I had no ESL class, so I had to be put into a class, uh, the class with all White kids. There were, like you, you, like you said, too, there were no Korean kids there in Virginia. I wanted to fit in, and at the same time my parents were poor in Korea, and I had to excel and had to go to Harvard or Yale—I had to study a lot. And because I spoke no word of English, although I wanted to fit in, I had all the American flags, and the, uh, all the American stuff, like, you know, I hate, like I start, I push myself to I hate eating kimchee. I hate, I pushed myself to hating bulgogi because I wanted to fit in. I was sixteen, I came here alone, I—parents were back in Korea, and uh, I wanted to be American. (F)

Koreans associated with U.S. intervention. One participant offered the theme of Koreans being associated with U.S. intervention. Jonathan stated, “‘Oh, you mean, where was I, my family from? Korea.’ Oh, and then, inevitably, it’s like, the older gentleman, it’s probably about the Korean War…. Back then, I think it was that most of
people identified Korea through ‘Mash’”(F).

**Placing responsibility for U.S. imperialism on Korea.** One participant appeared to place the responsibility for U.S. imperialism on Korea. Michael observed, “…just looking at the, the reason that FTA, um, development, and the way the, the law was written, uh, it definitely benefits the U.S. a lot more than Korea”(I). He later ascribed this asymmetry to Korea: “…even just looking up, at the FTA approve--you know--agreement… I wish if Korea was a little bit more stronger and, uh, mature…they may…you know, have better outcomes than what we have now”(I).

**Korea’s status elevates Korean American identity.** Participants noted that Korea’s rising status elevated their Korean American identity. Natalie stated, “if the power dynamic between Korea, and, and the States were more just…drastically different, … not as comfortable as I am now, to, to say that I am Korean American, or to, to talk about Korean culture or whatnot”(I). Steven reported this sentiment in the following account:

> I mean, I could probably say easily that I am Korean now than if I were in back in 1992, if I wanted to say I’m Korean, they will say, “Oh,” you know, “How are you doing?” (laughs) “How’s your country doing?” or something, (group member: mm) but now if I tell them I’m Korean, they say, “Oh, I love Korean food” or they’ll say, “Hey, I have Samsung phone” or something like that. I feel more…feel, you know, I find myself, you know, easier to be more me, more Kor—more me as a Korean. (F)

Michael echoed this theme:
Like... you... I am glad...that like, like I say, Korea is on the right path, you know, it doesn’t make me feel that I, you know, I, I’m in the bad... um... like, I don’t want to say the—this kind of word, but, you know, I’m glad, yeah, what if, what if I was born in Pakistan, and you know, what if, uh, 9-11 happened the people look at me a different way, I-I started looking at it that way also. (I)

Acknowledgment and acceptance of U.S. imperialism. Participants appeared to implicitly acknowledge and accept U.S. imperialism. This theme can be seen in Leo’s narrative:

At the same time, Stalin and Franklin Roosevelt... and, Churchill, would divide up all the whol—whole world. In the North it was, uh, occupied by the Stalin, you know, Stalin’s ... uh, yeh—oh, he had a group un—in North Korea, and... U.S. definitely, had a... interest in the South. … I mean, you go and, you know, debate, I mean, you could look at, look at like, you know, morally, you could look at it from historically, uh, you know, you could, p-point fingers, you know, this happened because of that. However, that’s what happened, back, you know, sixty years ago, at the same time, you know, m-me, in twenty-eleven, my question to myself, and, any other Korean Americans, ‘so, now what?’ It happened, and, that’s the card that, Koreans were dealt with, and what are you gonna, how are you gonna make best out of what you have right now? (I)

Jonathan appeared to accept U.S. imperialism by belittling Korea’s struggle with international power dynamics:

So it—Korea has always—during that time have been very, um, um, impacted by
the actions of other countries. And...they were really living-- they were trying to cling on to the past glory, but things weren’t really happening, (laugh) you know, for Koreans. (I)

**Discomfort with negative stance toward the U.S./Avoiding blaming the U.S.**

Participants also appeared to be uncomfortable with a negative stance toward the U.S. Their accounts belied a need to avoid blaming the U.S. For example, Michael stated, “I'm not saying, you know…the…U.S. did the right thing or not, but…we're definitely getting oppressed by these people”(I). He later stated, “So, that's why I was saying, it's better for me to s-spend my energy thinking about the solution instead of uh…blaming one side”(I). Jonathan expressed discomfort with Steven’s negative stance toward the U.S., stating, “Uh, it’s not a story that I hear a lot, um, so... but—it—you know, I’m sure there are people who feel that way. I just never met them…. It’s not a perspective I can identify with”(I). Jonathan also noted the following:

I would say [my view of the U.S. is] s-still positive. Becau--and primarily because, I think, I think back, and I look at all the countries, and... you know, look at 1910, and look at all the countries, what they were going through. Look at 1950, look at all the countries and what they were going through. Look at 2000, and what, you know, what. So... i-it... I feel like... when making a judgment, you have to judge it, within correct parameters. And when you do that... you know, it's uh, I guess I’m less critical, of, the country, as a result of that. (I)

**Ideology of social Darwinism.** Participants espoused the ideology of social Darwinism. Leo made the following statement:
In the political, um... you know, everything’s politics. And... in, in, when you deal with politics, it’s like a little pie chart? And that pie chart has x amount of power. And everybody’s fighting over, y-which, you know, which, who’s entitled to that power. … So when you say this power, negotiation, sorry to say, Korea is still junior partner. You said they come a long way, Samsung, LG, Hyundai, probably in business, yeah they caught up. But, because the country, because the history and the conflict, they’re gonna treat us as junior partners. And it’s natural for U.S. to pick and choose. You’re gonna choose China over Korea? They’re gonna pick China. Japan over Korea? They’re gonna pick Japan. (I)

Leo’s assertion implied that it is natural for the U.S. to treat Koreans as a lesser country and that in order to be treated equally, a country must prove its worth.

Michael noted, “I think Korea is definitely in the right path...uh, in terms of the international status, I guess.... if Korea was like, you know, Sudan or, or, um, Afghanistan, or Somalia, it, that--that could be completely different”(I). In this statement, Michael delineated a hierarchy of nations, in which Korea is above Afghanistan or Somalia but below the U.S. and implies that a nation that follows the “right path,” i.e., the path toward U.S.-style industrialization, will ultimately thrive.

**Emotions/Affect**

Participants’ accounts reflected various emotions about the issues-at-hand. The affective content of the participant narratives included (a) suppression/minimization of affect around racism, (b) shame, (c) pain/anger around racism, (d) guilt about/distancing from anger toward Whites, (e) hope for change, (f) hopelessness about racism, (g)
ambivalence about heightened consciousness of racism/racialization.

**Suppression/minimization of affect around racism.** Participants appeared to suppress or minimize their affect around racism. Leo reported his experiences with racism in the following way:

You know, and then they, they use this, you know, mimicking, they put these two fingers on their eyes, they go like this (uses fingers to create “slanty eyes”) “Asaw, asaw, asaw,” this is when you know, notice that you’re different. (pause) *I don’t think I ever, like, ashamed to be Korean.* (italics mine)(F)

Jonathan also minimized his feelings about racism:

...only, only because I personally have not experienced (M1: mm-hmm) that type of violence, other than people, you know, screaming out obscenities and, you know, racial slurs, which, and, I mean I guess it is violence, but I mean I don’t really see that as a physical harm to me, right, I mean other than raising my blood pressure by twenty points (laughs) (group member laughs), and wanting to go hit something, you know, but that’s really, you could control that, it’s you, you know. (F)

**Shame.** One prominent emotion expressed by participants was shame about various issues, ranging from shame about not living up to the model minority myth to shame about their low socioeconomic status and shame about Korea’s failures. Steven stated, “Cause I’ve sort of told everybody that I-- , you know, I was a thief (laughs). …No one knows in the world, but, that group”(I). He went on to report the following:

...I thought that it—that’s something that everybody would agree and everybody
would ah...um perhaps everybody went through similar things but apparently it wasn’t, there were some (pause) people there who were well off, as in (laughs) financially, from their parents uh, (laughs) and then, it was, it was a little, a little bit embarrassing that I shared uh,… (I)

Jonathan noted, “you know, like when that cloning thing came out, I was little ashamed, you know” (F).

**Pain/anger around racism.** Participants reported pain and anger around the experience of racism. Steven reported the following experience:

But I like walking around with my parents, and we walk around, and always these high school kids at night, all the athletes--...big guys, big, big guys. They drive around their trucks to impress girls, … and they drive around and they see me…especially when there’s a girl next to, sitting next to him, he always make a remark…they make a remark. And I always tell my parents, “See? (Jonathan laughs) (Steven laughs) That’s what you’re here for. They are going to tell you you are Chino”…“D-do you like it here? I mean, is it why you came? Why did you come? (group member: mm) I told you not to come to this country.” (F)

Steven also made the following statement, reflecting on his experiences with racism:

I-I, honestly, it makes me a little bit upset…Um... because I’m—like I said in the beginning, I tried to forget about all this...cultural differences... because I don’t want to think about it... I... I’m busy with my work, I just want to live my life, and never wanted, didn’t want to think about the racism that I have had to encounter... but all these…questions... recalled all those memories... (I)
Guilt about/distancing from anger toward Whites. Participants appeared to feel guilty about and distance from their anger toward Whites around racism. The following exchange between the interviewer and Leo demonstrates this distancing:

Leo: You know, first reaction is you get mad or angry about it, at the same time... um... (pause) I know sometimes you try to take a higher road [Interviewer: Mm-hmm]

Leo: (laughs) not to involve, get involved, w-, you know, not to be too combative, or contest the person because, uh, any one of the things we say is, it’s not worth it. (pause) You know, and sometimes we don’t get involved, when, som—with, with the people that, are ignorant.

Interviewer: (pause) So this might be a dumb question, um, but, what in, what about ignorance-based racism makes you angry?

Leo: (long pause) It hasn’t happened to me directly. (I)

Leo appeared to sidestep the request to elaborate on his anger by ultimately distancing from racism experiences. Steven reflected on his focus group disclosures in this way:

“Umm...and, and honestly I ... wanted to um, … change some of my views a little bit…because I was a little hostile, towards.... um...you know, Caucasians’(I).

Hope for change. Participants expressed hope for change in power dynamics. Michael made the following statement:

I can see, you know, how minority places like, you know, there's a strong female in Europe, and you know, Black man in the U.S. leading the politics, and economics, so I see this as a ch--big change, and I see my daughter, and my
nephews, uh, may have a better chance. (I)

In reflecting on the growing Korean American census, Michael added, “the number itself give me a good idea about we're maybe changing to the right direction. Maybe we have enough manpower to…influence the U.S. politics and the interest itself”(I).

**Hopelessness about racism.** Participants also expressed some hopelessness about racism. Steven, in particular, appeared to grapple with feelings of hopelessness, stating, “I-I’m just one individual person, so I don’t think I can do anything”(I). He further stated, “Uh... so... I think that this, this sort of systematical issue of racism in America will not change in hundred years, I don’t think…”(I)

**Ambivalence about heightened consciousness of racism/racialization.** Participants reported ambivalence about their heightened consciousness around issues of racism and racialization as a result of the focus group and individual interviews. Michael noted, “Yeah, thinking about it more and I can just feel it--little differently, so I'm not sure if that was good thing or bad thing”(I). Steven, in the individual interview, made the following statement about his experience of participating in the study:

…because of this discussion, because of your asking all these questions, sort of made me organize my thoughts…. But if I knew that this would be so... uh, stressful... by... bringing up my past...my...on my own, I mean it’s, it wasn’t forced or anything, it’s just... uh, I wanted to answer the question as... detailed, in as detail as I could, and uh, it’s just a little bit... too stressful and uh, (sigh) and if I knew this, I don’t know if I wanted to... uh (laughs)…(inaudible) question. Not that it was bad... it’s just I don’t want to think about it in my daily life. (I)
Intersectionality

Participants’ accounts alluded to the intersections of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, spirituality, age/generation, and identity negotiation. Subthemes that comprised the theme of intersectionality included (a) class privilege shaping racial experience, (b) education/class privilege linked with cultural sensitivity, (c) gendered constraints in Korea shaping positive perception of U.S., (d) Asian masculinity validated by White woman, (e) generation/age influencing cultural/racial identity, (f) exoticization of Asian women by White men, (g) Asian males ascribed lower status than Asian females, (h) identity consolidation & acceptance intersecting with spirituality & significant relationship.

Class privilege shaping racial experience. Participants’ accounts underscored how class privilege shapes racial experience. Steven reported his perception of how others’ class privilege left him feeling alienated in his racialized experiences:

...I thought that it—that’s something that everybody would agree and everybody would ah...um perhaps everybody went through similar things but apparently it wasn’t; there were some (pause) people there who were well off, as in (laughs) financially, from their parents uh, (laughs) and then, it was, it was a little, a little bit embarrassing that I shared uh,… (I)

Others implicitly shared how their own class privilege influenced their experience of race. Michael recalled his first impression of the U.S.:

You know, actually I think America was very much like what I expected, in a way. Like first house I saw was my uncle’s house in San Francisco, has, had a gated
community, a swimming pool and all of that, and my cousins were playing football and all that, so I thought, okay, this is exactly what it should look like. (F)

Natalie’s memory of how race was treated in the U.S. was shaped by her class privilege: “Um, so I came to a boarding school, I was in an episcopal school. Um, so, it’s a small, private boarding school, where, um, diversity, you know, was celebrated” (F). Leo offered, “So I had a very good memory of my, my, I guess formative years, about America. And at school I went to, everyone was friendly, and they spent money to hire another ESL teacher, just for my sister, my brother, and myself” (F).

**Education/class privilege linked with cultural sensitivity.** Participants’ narratives also implicitly linked cultural sensitivity with education or class privilege. Michael reported, “The people that I’m involved with, mm, um, more, um… I mean they're well-educated … I mean the people that I'm working with are very culturally exposed, and I never thought they are, (pause) you know, react to racial issues” (I).

Natalie made the following comment, implicitly linking cultural sensitivity with class privilege:

Um, people do, I think, I don’t know, or-ah-people that I interact, like, um, people who are superior to me in a hospital, like attending-level doctors, like, they would, um, recognize that Koreans are different from Chinese people, and they, like, they would, like, you know, in a, in a, they would comment on-on like food or something like Target moms, like, you know, because I’m in pediatrics, so like they’re interested in those kind of cultures, in a positive way. (F)

**Gendered constraints in Korea shaping positive perception of U.S.** One
participant, the only woman of the group, noted how gendered constraints in Korea shaped her positive perception of the U.S. Natalie stated, “For sure. I even felt [that in Korea] like as a girl, you should even look a certain way, you should even dress a certain way, and you sh—you have to be pretty, otherwise it’s a crime, you know”(F).

Asian masculinity validated by White woman. One participant’s account described the validation of Asian masculinity by a White woman. Jonathan recalled the following incident:

I remember walking down the street and some guys were making, you know, some disparaging remarks, and I just started getting really mad, and she just looked over and she said, “you know what, and he’s great,” (laughs) an-and you know, she just kind of walked off, and I thought oh that’s a nice way to handle it (laughs). (F)

Generation/Age influencing cultural/racial identity. Participants posited generation or age as influencing their cultural and racial identities. In puzzling over why she thinks the status of Korea does not affect her identity, Natalie wondered, “Is it because I’m younger?”(F) Michael asserted, “If you ask more contemporary culture, you might be [sic] very different reaction”(F). Jonathan stated, “And (pause) and maybe it’s because I-you know, I’m older, um, and a lot of what I’m saying is, kind of, retrospective perspective (laughs)”(I).

Exoticization of Asian women by White men. Participants’ narratives explicitly and implicitly highlighted the exoticization of Asian women by White men. Steven observed, “Big, football, American White people will drive around the car, uh, there’s a
Asian girl walking down, and they will, all they will say is, ‘Hey, do you have time? Hey, you wanna, you know, come ri-, come ride with us?’ That’s all they will say”(F).

Michael noted, “The people that I’m involved with, mm, um, more um…I mean they're well-educated, and they, (pause) they…yeah, um…are married to an Asian woman”(I).

**Asian men ascribed lower status than Asian women.** One participant noted the lower status ascribed to Asian men versus Asian women. Steven stated, “If the same situation with the Asian guy is walking around the, on the street, [White men] will throw something, or they will say, “Yo, Chino,” or they will, they will yell, “Yellow!” They will never say, “Hey, do you wanna ride with us?” They will never say that”(F).

**Identity consolidation and acceptance intersecting with spirituality and significant relationship.** Jonathan noted that the process of identity consolidation and acceptance intersected with his spirituality and significant relationship. He described his process of accepting his racial and cultural identities in the following way:

And... it wasn’t until, I would say, well into my twenties... ... um...and, even, as I started to get, um, serious with, uh, my current wife... and... uh-uh, coincidentally, uh, around the time when I started really thinking about my whole spirituality again, that, I think... maybe things started to click for me, and... I think... eventually, that’s... the path that led me to... really have... discovered the love of myself. (I)

**Negotiation of Self-Identity**

Participants explicitly indicated factors that influenced their negotiation of self-identity. At the same time, their accounts implicitly belied various experiences and
processes that, perhaps unconsciously, influenced their identities. Taken together, the theme of negotiation of self-identity included the following subthemes: (a) identity determined by multiple factors, (b) racialization/racism impacting self-identity/sense of belonging, (c) bicultural identification, (d) confusion about self-identity (e) loss of connection to Korea, (f) Korean identity as fixed/inescapable, (g) emphasizing self-definition.

Identity determined by multiple factors. The theme of multiple factors determining identity could be seen participants’ accounts. Natalie stated, “And also I was, y-I wasn’t a Ko—uh, an American citizen I was a green card holder, so ... by the citizenship status I was also Korean. So, um, and also my parents were in Korea”(I). She noted that her identity later changed to Korean American, stating, “I mean I guess that came with, you know, more, um, mmm like a cultural awareness of my surroundings, in my social networks, type of stuff”(I). Jonathan pointed to a biological basis of Korean identity:

I mean there’s certainly some, you know, it, inherent tendencies, you have the, in some way you have to have some sort of blood link, right? (laughs) Whether you’re mixed or... a hundred percent, or two percent, whatever, there has to be something that makes you want to identify with that culture. (I)

Jonathan also implicitly acknowledged that his positive perception of the U.S. influences his American identity:

Interviewer: ...And how does [a positive view of the U.S.] affect your... identification?
Jonathan: Umm.... I’m not sure if it really does. I mean, ’cause I see myself as, someone who’s a citizen of this country, and have no plans of leaving...going anywhere else. (I)

Participants’ narratives also reflected the view of assimilation as a linear process. Natalie expressed this view in the following way:

So, it was more like a chronological—it’s like a, passing of time, (pause) I guess...as opposed to... I mean I guess that came with, you know, more, um, mmm, like a cultural awareness of my surroundings, in my social networks, type of stuff that, kind of, made my identity evolved as um, uh Korean, to Korean American slash American. (I)

Leo stated, “My identity...(long pause) I mean....’cause, as I said before, I’ve been here for so long, I see myself as more American than more Korean”(I).

Racialization/racism impacting self-identity/sense of belonging. Participants’ narratives indicated that racialization/racism influenced their self-identity or sense of belonging. Michael noted, “And when I came here, I see a different race and people, so I see myself as a Korean American”(I). Steven stated, “if the world thinks that I am…yellow…Asian…and not American, then I'd rather be…uh…a very strong Korean and support Korea”(I). Jonathan remembered, “Well I guess on one hand, I guess there was a period where I would... try to forsake anything Korean...Or, it wasn’t that important to me. Umm... that was just the baggage that I didn’t need, I suppose”(I). He also noted the impact of racism in the present: “But the reality is that I think it still does. I think, you know, I think there’s still a place for... um... we’re still seeking that somewhat of a—
Bicultural identification. Participants identified themselves as bicultural. For example, Jonathan stated, “I’m really neither that or this. (laughs) (Michael: mm) I’m kind of, uh, a comp-, you know, amalgamation of both”(F). He further stated, “I realized that.... my life that I shared with [a Korean girlfriend] was just part of, you know, who I was...and...I felt like... it wasn’t fully me”(F). Michael noted, “I actually never thought of myself as American American. I see my daughter as American American—she was born here. But I always thought myself as a Korean American”(F).

Confusion about self-identity. Natalie’s account manifested confusion about her identity. She made the following statement:

I would nev—I would probably never... just... identify myself as..Ameri—well, but that’s not true. Um...(long pause). No, I think that I would always be Korean American, but... if there are situations where... I would... consider myself... American... regardless of...(pause) the prejudice or whatnot, so... I would, there would be, uh, times when, times or situations where I would assert myself American. Even I—I would not—that, that—as opposed to Korean American, even. So... (I)

Loss of connection to Korea. Participants expressed a loss of connection to Korea. Jonathan stated, “You know, although there’s tenuous threads of connection, it’s really not influencing you”(F). Natalie asserted, “There’s no, there’s no conscious
connection to Korea” (F). Michael made the following statement:

I was really culturally shocked, how fast change, uh, Korea has changed, and, and ever since then I go back because I marry and all that, every year, every year I go back there I just, the speed of change in Korea is kind of uh scary, you know, in a way, because I could not identify anymore. It’s just so different, and uh, each time I come back here, it just felt more home, I think, so that, things just shifted for me. It felt like, oh, this is more home than that. (F)

**Korean identity as fixed/inescapable.** Despite fragile connections to Korea, many of the participants appeared to view their Korean identity as fixed or inescapable, as seen in Steven’s account:

…and now, I am sort of in, I've settled. I, I, I'm, I'm settled. I...don't change my identity because of some stupid incidents…or anything like that. I already do feel that I am Korean and then I don't think it will ever change. I meant I'm old enough and I have about 30 to 40 years to live (chuckles) (I)

Michael stated, “I don’t think I can get away from [my Korean identity]”(I). Natalie also reported, “No, because as I say, it is what it is, ‘cause that’s kind of who I am …. And, it’s something I can’t change”(I).

**Emphasizing self-definition.** At the same time, participants emphasized the importance of defining their own identity. Jonathan stated, “I think, at the end of the day, it’s, if you choose... to... embrace... that... um ...(pause) embrace that Korean American-ness, I think is what makes you Korean American at the end of the day”(I). Similarly, Leo stated, “And... at the same time, knowing that I’m Asian, you know, there is cul—
Korean culture or Korean, um, tradition, that I follow, and it’s my choice”(I). Michael noted, “but as a person, each time you have to identify yourself first, right, to know who you are”(F).

**Participant Feedback**

After the narratives were analyzed, participants were contacted by email and provided with a summary of the findings, which delineated the themes and subthemes in outline form. Only one of the participants responded initially, requesting that the findings be summarized into a narrative and placed within the context of the research questions. Accordingly, I provided all of them with a brief overview of the statement of the problem, research questions, and highlights of the findings (see Appendix G), again via email. Three of the five participants responded to this email. Steven only indicated that he did not have anything to say. Michael stated, “I agree with most of your terms, but some parts [individualistic ideology, false consciousness] are somewhat negative and suppressed.” Jonathan reported his agreement with most of the findings but stated the following objections to some of the themes:

…I can only speak for myself here but are you saying that I stated that race does not matter in the U.S.? If so, I’d like to know the context, because I do not remember making such statement because I do not agree with it… By individualistic ideology (American Dream), do you mean that I stated that if you work hard, you can succeed? That is possible that I made such a statement, but I am not sure if necessarily decontextualizes individual's experiences and invalidates experiences with systemic oppression. This seems like a rather broad
statement to me, one that does not leave the possibility that the world is more complex and that you can have this ability to work hard (which is BTW much more Korean or Korean American trait these days) while recognizing there are forces of systemic oppression. I disagree with the premise of your statement… What did I say that demonstrated this false consciousness? You are basically saying that I am keeping myself down by accepting my own lies which are perpetuated by myself, causing me to stay in my own state of oppression?

It was clear from Michael and Jonathan’s responses that they disagreed with some of the interpretations of the data. Although disagreement between participants’ and judges’ interpretations of the narratives was not unexpected, it highlighted the tension between my desire to empower the participants on one hand and my goal of critically reading the narratives to illuminate how imperialism distorts participants’ understanding of themselves. As stated in Chapter Three, interpretation in critical hermeneutics is always situated, and as such the goal is not to “accurately” capture authorial intentions. One of the main objectives of critical hermeneutics is the “exposé and critique of ideology” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 104). As such, my interpretation of the data centers on the role of power dynamics and hegemonic ideologies in participants’ identity negotiation. Participants’ interpretations, on the other hand, may center on themselves as the ultimate agents of their own identities. I was unable to fully resolve the tension between my goal, on one hand, of empowering participants by raising their consciousness and giving voice to their marginalized experiences and my goal, on the other hand, of shedding light on how power dynamics hinder the participants from a critical
understanding of their own oppression. Because this was not a participatory-action research endeavor, it may have been inevitable that the present study could not fully empower the participants. Here, I can only note how differences in agendas emerged in disagreements over the interpretation of participants’ narratives.
Chapter 5
Discussion
The present study was designed to critically understand the ways in which U.S. imperialism influences the identity negotiation of a group of adult bicultural Koreans living in the U.S. Five adult, bicultural Koreans living in the U.S. participated in a focus group discussion and subsequently elaborated on the themes from the group in individual, semi-structured phone interviews.

The focus group and individual interview data were analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Osborne, 2008). Additionally, Anderson and Jack’s (1991) “three ways of listening” (p. 19), i.e., attending to moral language, meta-statements, and the logic of the narrative, were used as a means of critically listening for subtle communications about the influence of contextual factors, such as power dynamics.


This chapter provides an overview of the findings in light of previous literature, discusses implications of the results for theory and practice, reviews the strengths and limitations of the study, and offers directions for future research.
Overview of the Results

The most significant contribution of this study was linking the field of bicultural identity within psychology with postcolonial studies within the broader social sciences. Although colonialism and bicultural identity has been studied separately, the present findings bring the two fields together and highlight the importance of understanding U.S. imperialism and colonial mentality as a context for understanding bicultural identity. The present study points to the need to broaden multicultural studies within counseling psychology, wherein the focus has been on understanding bicultural individuals’ experiences of and within the U.S. The study expands the field by bringing into focus bicultural individuals’ experiences of the power dynamics between the U.S. and the nation from which they immigrated. Adopting a critical theory lens departs from the more positivist paradigm of most counseling psychology research, allowing for a critical understanding of power dynamics on bicultural individuals’ identity negotiation.

The results of the study suggested that participants were deeply influenced in various ways by both the asymmetrical power dynamics within the U.S., i.e., between the White majority culture and ethnic Korean culture, and the power dynamics that exist globally, i.e., between the U.S. and Korea. The study findings highlighted the significant impact of the power wielded by the U.S. to define Korea’s status along an international hierarchy, and Koreans’ status within the U.S., all of which were apparently internalized by each of the participants. The participants’ colonial mentality and false consciousness, created in the colonial context, in turn complicated the participants’ ability to agentically define their sociocultural identities. The present themes suggested that for the five
bicultural Koreans who participated in this study, the negotiation of their bicultural identity was a complicated process of maintaining ties to two cultures while navigating various demands, impositions, losses, and oppressive beliefs.

First, individuals’ experiences as immigrants involved a process of losing their sense of belonging, power, and voice, and accepting the demand to assimilate to mainstream, predominantly White culture. A large part of the loss of power and voice appeared to be due to being racialized by others, who were predominantly White. Thus, because racial group membership was in part forced on these bicultural Koreans, predominantly in negative ways, negotiating their identity involved making meaning out of their racial identity. That is, being a racialized other appeared to have complicated their process of identifying as American, given the message that American equals White, which many of them internalized. At the same time, their racialization appeared to have highlighted for them their Korean identity, to which they variously responded by either downplaying their Korean identity to reduce their sense of being other or identifying more strongly as Korean to increase a sense of agency in their racialization experience.

As a part of the experience of racialization, individuals in the study were pulled into what C.J. Kim (1999) termed racial triangulation, in which Asians, as the so-called model minority, are pitted against other people of color, particularly Blacks, who supposedly “live off of welfare,” and yet as Asians are not fully accepted as American because of their perpetual foreigner status. It was notable to see how many of the study participants endorsed stereotypes about themselves as model minorities and other people of color as the undesirable minority. They did not appear to have an awareness of their
role in the Black/White racial dynamics, nor how the model minority stereotype and perpetual foreigner status simultaneously affected their bicultural identity. That is, the individuals in the present study belied a need to be seen as American, apparently in reaction to their perpetual foreigner status, and one way in which they sought to be accepted was to endorse the model minority stereotype.

Moreover, it appeared that almost all of the bicultural Koreans experienced some form of interpersonal or systemic racism, and these experiences appeared to have influenced their identity as Korean or sense of belonging to the Korean American community. This finding is interesting because experiences with racism appeared to impact their cultural and ethnic identity rather than their racial identity. The literature on ethnic identity has largely ignored whether perceived discrimination strengthens ethnic identity, with most studies focusing on ethnic identity as a buffer between racism and distress (e.g., Lee, 2003, 2005; Mossakowski, 2003; Yoo & Lee, 2005, 2009).

It is possible that for these participants at least, the distinction between racial and ethnic identity is not readily apparent. Alternatively, racial identity might be a somewhat artificial construct that is externally imposed on them while ethnic identity is a personally meaningful construct. That is, the present participants’ identity as Korean may have been impacted by racist experiences because the experience of being treated negatively based on homogenous grouping (i.e., as Asian) was discordant with participants’ identification of themselves as a member of a specific cultural and ethnic group. Thus, although racism made these participants feel othered based on race, they appeared to react by identifying more strongly as Korean or connecting to other Korean Americans.
In addition to race and ethnicity, participants spoke of ways in which their other identities, such as age, gender, and generation status, intersect with their racial and cultural identities. At times members of the coding team experienced participants’ discussion of these intersectionalities as ways to avoid talking about race. That is, talking about age and generation status appeared to be more comfortable for the participants than focusing on race.

One identity that was not explicitly identified by participants (except through the proxy of “education”) but which clearly manifested in the participants’ narratives as a factor in their racial experience was class. It was clear from their narratives that most of the participants were from a privileged background in terms of social class, and this appeared to have shaped the kinds of racial experiences they had, ranging from the so-called celebration of diversity at a boarding school to access to ESL teachers to facilitate language assimilation. However, as with many of the other themes that emerged from the present study, individuals did not appear to have much awareness of their class privilege or how this privilege intersected with their racial experiences.

Despite their experiences with racism and racialization, participants endorsed a color-blind ideology, i.e., the belief that race does not matter (Neville et al., 2000), which serves to invalidate and thereby perpetuate systemic racism within the U.S. This ideology was manifested in various ways, ranging from holding assimilation and color-blind attitudes as the ideal, assuming a level playing field, to minimizing racialization and positing a connection to all human beings. Reflective of color-blind ideology, participants showed a general discomfort with talking about race and acknowledging
racialized experiences. As Hammack (2008) pointed out, the extent to which a person reproduces the master narrative or diverges from it is context dependent; groups experiencing greater threats to their existential security may feel the need to conform to the master narrative. For the participants in this study, who, as immigrants, inevitably experienced threats to their security, there may be a need to reproduce the master narrative of color-blindness. As mentioned in Chapter Four, it was especially interesting that one participant (Steven), who explicitly described how racism influenced him, made overtly hostile remarks about Whites during the focus group, endorsed a color-blind ideology during the subsequent individual interview. It appeared that the color-blind ideal, as posited by the focus group as a whole, had influenced him to adopt a more color-blind ideal. As van Dijik (1998) pointed out, ideology is often reproduced via a “complex, co-operative procedure, involving people who (already) ‘know’, as well as people who ‘still don’t know’” (p. 229).

In addition to color-blind ideology, participants endorsed an individualistic ideology, the hegemonic ideology in the U.S. that serves to perpetuate the myth of the American dream and decontextualizes individuals’ experiences. This individualistic ideology was especially manifest in the participants’ belief that identity negotiation is a solely individualistic process. The idea of identity formation as an autonomous process free from sociocultural and historical forces dates back as far as the secularization of the self (de Peuter, 1998). As de Peuter pointed out, the Enlightenment led to the idea of self and society as an oppositional dichotomy, in which one must be free from social influences if one is to achieve individuality. Most of the participants in the present study
denied any impact of history, racism, and power dynamics on their identity, and indeed appeared to believe that an acknowledgment of the influence of these contextual factors was a “threat to authentic, independent self-realization” (de Peuter, 1998, p. 32). This denial of the impact of powerful contextual forces likely hinders a critical understanding of sociocultural systems, which would allow for critical engagement and dialogue around their social identities.

Overall, individuals’ narratives belied a false consciousness, i.e., an acceptance of oppressive beliefs that serve to perpetuate minorities’ own oppression and maintain the status quo (Jost, 1995). The most notable manifestations of false consciousness were comments that participants made in which they held themselves responsible for racism while absolving Whites of responsibility, and locating racism outside of their place of residence, rendering racism as an old relic from the South or other “racist” locales. The former belief serves to justify oppressive systems by blaming the victim for their own oppression. The belief that racism only exists in the South or outside their own place of residence perpetuates the status quo by making racism the problem of a few “racist” people or a few “racist” states.

At the same time, individuals’ narratives underscored a critical consciousness, i.e., awareness of oppressive realities and a desire to change those realities (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). This was perhaps one of the most striking of the results, namely that almost all of the participants appeared to simultaneously manifest a mix of false and critical consciousness. The dismantling of false consciousness and development of critical consciousness involves “questioning the legitimacy of outgroup dominance and
increasing ingroup cohesion without reifying negative ingroup stereotypes” (Quintana & Segura-Herrera, 2003, p.275). It is possible that the present participants had begun to question the legitimacy of racism and imperialism on one hand, yet were still struggling to let go of stereotypes about themselves and other people of color. Additionally, their reproduction of color-blind ideology and individualistic ideology may have served as barriers to a critical examination of existing realities. Thus, although the participants implicitly acknowledged the existence of power dynamics and at times identified with the ingroup (i.e., Koreans/Korean Americans) in response to these dynamics, the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies may constrain them from a full realization of the system of oppression.

Additionally, individuals’ narratives manifested various beliefs about the superiority of the U.S. vs. the inferiority of Korea. This theme was one of the most significant ways in which U.S. imperialism manifested in the mental colonization of the participants. Despite participants’ denial that power dynamics on the global stage influence their identity, participants clearly had internalized messages about the superiority of the U.S. and the inferiority of Korea, which in turn manifested in feelings of shame. This discrepancy highlighted the potentially harmful dissociation operating for subjugated individuals who are blind to the impact of their own subjugation. The findings of this study underscored the ways in which the oppressed comes to internalize the oppressive beliefs of the colonizer as a result of the disempowerment inherent in the colonial context (Pieterse et al., 2011).

Finally, all of the above beliefs and experiences may have led participants to use
various strategies of self-identification, including at times identifying more strongly as American or Korean. Thus, despite many of the participants’ denial that they were influenced by power dynamics between Korea and the U.S. or racism within the U.S., participants’ identities as Korean, American, and Korean American appeared to be at least partly in response to their experiences of racialization, racism, and U.S. imperialism. In particular, participants appeared to identify with the Korean part of their Korean American identity partly in response to the experience of being othered within the U.S. based on their race. Participants noted that in recent years, the rising status of Korea on the global stage allowed them to take greater pride in and ownership of their Korean identity. At the same time, their status as perpetual foreigner apparently led them to emphasize their American citizenship while beliefs about U.S. superiority served to strengthen their need to identify as American.

To summarize, it is possible to think of bicultural negotiation for the study’s participants as involving multiple strategies in response to the complex sociocultural contexts of U.S. imperialism, racialization, and racism. Individuals received messages about American superiority and Korean inferiority even prior to their immigration to the U.S., which were likely reinforced throughout their acculturation process within the U.S. Once in the U.S., individuals experienced a loss of belonging and voice. Important factors in this loss of belonging and voice were individuals’ racialization and racism experiences, which they needed to make sense of while trying to regain their sense of belonging and power. Individuals attempted to regain a sense of belonging and power in the following ways: they differentiated themselves from other people of color who
supposedly “live off of welfare” and identified with the model minority stereotype; they minimized racism and racialization and endorsed a color-blind ideology; they internalized beliefs about American superiority and Korean inferiority and identified as American; they minimized their perpetual foreigner status by asserting their American identity. At the same time, participants’ sense of being different made them connect with other Korean Americans and identify as Korean. Some of them identified more strongly as Korean as a means of taking a stand against racism and U.S. imperialism.

**Implications for Theory and Practice**

The themes that emerged in the present study have several implications for theory and practice, which are advanced cautiously due to the limitations of generalizing from a qualitative study of five participants. First, the present themes highlight the influence of racialization, racism, and loss of power on bicultural identity negotiation. Although there are a few exceptions (e.g., Padilla, 2006), the literature on bicultural identity mostly assumes that a person identifies with two cultures of equal status or power (e.g., Benet-Martinez et al, 2002; Chao & Hong, Haritatos & Benet-Martinez, 2005; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 19997). According to existing theory on bicultural identity (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Haritatos & Benet-Martinez, 2002), to the extent that individuals see their two cultures as compatible, they can appropriately switch their cultural frames according to the context and seamlessly integrate both cultural identities. However, this literature does not take into account how, for immigrants of color, the inevitable experience of racialization, discrimination, and loss of power in the new, predominantly White culture can lead to a complex process of valuing a culture-of-origin that is not
valued in the host culture, responding to assimilation demands in the face of loss of power, and making sense of their racialization experiences. The present themes suggest that researchers interested in bicultural identity need to attend to the experiences of loss of power, racism, and assimilation demands as part of a larger asymmetrical power dynamic, which may be integral to the experiences of bicultural people of color.

In psychotherapy with bicultural Koreans who are negotiating their cultural identities, clinicians should attend to the ways in which individuals’ experiences of racialization and racism complicate their negotiation of a bicultural identity. Due to the themes that bicultural competency and the internalization of two cultures likely involve making sense of often painful experiences of being racially othered, it may be helpful to help clients give voice to these experiences of racialization and racism and to facilitate meaning-making around these experiences as part of the clients’ process of negotiating a bicultural identity.

Second, the results of the present study also highlight the important role of ideologies, such as color-blind ideology and individualistic ideology, in negotiating a bicultural identity. Participants’ discomfort with acknowledging race and racialization, their endorsement of assimilation to White American culture, and belief in identity construction as an individualistic process divorced from history and sociocultural context sharply contrasted with their experiences of racialization and racism, the ways in which racialization and racism experiences influenced their need to prove themselves to and be accepted by Whites, their positioning of themselves as model minorities versus problematic minorities, and their need to assert their American identity. The role of
ideologies in the discursive practice of individuals’ identity negotiation is in line with theories on identity as narrative, in which individuals position themselves along various cultural storylines, including the grand narratives of a culture (e.g., Bruner, 1990). In line with Hammack’s (2008) integrated model of identity negotiation, the present findings highlight how individuals’ identities are constructed via social discourse, producing and reproducing hegemonic ideologies. The present themes are consistent with Hammack’s assertions about identity as situated in social context:

Social experience is integrated into a conception of self through the internalization of discursive norms and practices. In this way, the construction of the personal narrative that forms identity occurs in the context of a deep and meaningful social process. (p. 235)

Psychotherapists need to examine ways in which they engage with and discursively practice the hegemonic ideologies of color-blindness and individualism. Because clients’ negotiation of identities likely includes the reproduction of ideologies by way of therapeutic discourse, it is important for therapists to be aware of the ways in which therapeutic conversations engage hegemonic ideologies.

Thirdly, the operation of a false consciousness about racism within the U.S. was evident in the present themes. That is, participants displayed a tendency to absolve Whites of racism, place the responsibility for changing racism on Asian/Korean Americans, and locate racism outside of their place of residence, rendering racism a problem of a few “racist” states. In line with the literature on false consciousness and system-justification (Jost et al., 2002; Jost et al., 2003), despite belonging to a
disadvantaged group (as evidenced by their experiences of racism), the study participants tended to endorse system-justifying beliefs. Moreover, the majority of participants appeared to endorse meritocratic beliefs, i.e., that the system was basically fair and that systemic racism against Asians did not exist. It is possible that this denial of racism as a systemic problem is mediated by the participants’ apparent belief that White Americans generally hold Korean Americans in high regard due to their model minority status. This relationship between meritocratic beliefs, a form of false consciousness, and endorsement of the model minority stereotype would be in line with Wiley et al.’s (2012) research finding that first-generation Latinos were more likely to believe that other Americans held them in high regard, which in turn led to more meritocratic beliefs.

Practically, the influence of false consciousness on participants suggests that therapists working with bicultural Koreans may need to attend to ways in which individuals’ system-justifying beliefs influence their identity negotiation. An important part of the therapist’s role with bicultural Koreans struggling with their cultural identities may be to facilitate the development of a critical consciousness about racism in the U.S., which, in turn, might empower clients to develop a more critical understanding of, and thereby greater choice over, their racial and cultural identities.

Finally, U.S. imperialist influences were clearly seen in participants’ internalized beliefs about the superiority of the U.S. versus the inferiority of Korea. Moreover, although participants denied the influence of U.S. imperialism on their identity, they indicated that the rising status of Korea on the global stage elevated their Korean identity, suggesting that their internalized beliefs about the inferiority of Korea/Koreans likely
influence their identity as Koreans. Further, participants implicitly accepted an imperialist hierarchy among nations, in which Sudan, for example, is clearly positioned below Korea, which, in turn, is clearly positioned below the U.S. Based on this international hierarchy, participants apparently justified the asymmetrical power dynamic between U.S. and Korea, and the status of Americans versus the status of Koreans. This finding has significant implications for understanding how global power dynamics influence individuals’ cultural identities. Individuals appeared to internalize not only the international hierarchy among nations but also the inferiority of Korean culture based on this hierarchy, which, in turn, influenced their identity as Korean and their need to identify as American. There is a paucity of literature on the influence of imperialism and colonial mentality on bicultural identity (see David & Okasaki, 2006 and Bhatia & Ram, 2001 for exceptions). The present study suggests that research and theory on bicultural identity for people of color need to attend to imperialism and colonial mentality as important factors in negotiating a bicultural identity.

In terms of practice, therapists need to have an awareness of Korea’s history of U.S. imperialism and its potential impact on bicultural Koreans’ valuing of their Korean identity. Based on such awareness, clinicians can facilitate bicultural Koreans’ awareness of internalized beliefs about Korea versus the U.S. and help individuals examine the ways in which their identity as Korean or American is influenced by these internalized beliefs. An important part of practicing with bicultural Koreans may be to help individuals liberate themselves from colonial mentality.
Strengths, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

The present study had several strengths. First, the study focused on the significant impact of asymmetrical power dynamics globally (between the U.S. and Korea) and locally (between White Americans and Korean Americans within the U.S.) on bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation. Because the extant literature on biculturalism has largely ignored the impact of power dynamics between cultures on bicultural identity, the present study fills a gap in the literature and points to future directions within the field.

Second, a focus group was used as one method of collecting participant narratives. The use of a focus group increased contextual meaning-making, reduced the power dynamic between researcher and participants, and facilitated consciousness-raising (Wilkinson, 1999). The impact of this study’s use of a focus group on consciousness-raising was evidenced in participants’ report of increased awareness around issues of race and culture due to the focus group discussion. The increase in critical consciousness is evidence of the study’s catalytic validity (Lather, 1991).

Third, the use of Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith & Osborn, 2008) and Anderson and Jack’s (1991) “three ways of listening” (p. 19) in analyzing the data were in line with critical theory, which attends to how power dynamics manifest in all human endeavors (Prilleltensky, 2008). That is, by attending to the significance of themes rather than counting frequencies, the data analysis privileged all of the voices of the participants. In addition, the data analysis attended to the implicit ways in which power dynamics manifested in the participants’ accounts rather than simply taking the explicit content at face value. As such, the present study used methods of analysis that
increased the likelihood of capturing factors, such U.S. imperialism, ideologies, and false consciousness, which operate at an implicit rather than explicit level of consciousness (Jost et al., 2002).

One limitation is that the analysis did not necessarily attend to how the follow-up individual interviews differed from or elaborated on the focus group discussion. The focus group transcript and subsequent individual interviews were each treated as a case in the analysis. Although some of the differences that emerged in the individual interviews were noted in Chapter Four, the differences were not specifically attended to in the analysis. This method of analyzing the data may have resulted in a loss of the richness in how the individual interviews contradicted or supported the focus group themes.

Moreover, given that one of the aims of the focus group was consciousness-raising, it would have been meaningful to explicitly attend to the ways in which the participants reflected on their focus group experience in their individual interviews.

Second, a limited amount of demographic data was gathered from the participants. A more comprehensive demographic questionnaire, including socioeconomic background, education, and marital status, would have led to a richer context for understanding the participants’ accounts.

Third, despite efforts to empower the participants and include them in the analysis process, I formulated the original research questions, assumed much of the responsibility for data analysis, and have the “final say” through the write-up of my interpretations. Thus, the present study is limited in the degree to which it fully includes and empowers the participants of the study. Given the critical paradigm from which the study operates,
this is a significant limitation.

The study findings, along with the study’s strengths and limitations, point to directions for future research. In light of the study’s findings that U.S. imperialist influences on both the local and global stage as well as hegemonic ideologies that support the status quo significantly impacted the participants’ negotiation of their identities, further research is needed to shed light on the exact process by which these larger sociocultural factors influence the negotiation of a bicultural identity.

Qualitative research focusing specifically on how colonial mentality and system-justifying ideologies are discursively reproduced via individuals’ narratives about their cultural identities would enrich our understanding of the process of how U.S. imperialism influences identity negotiation.

Quantitative research can add to the understanding of U.S. imperialist influences on bicultural identity. A measure of colonial mentality specific to bicultural Koreans could be constructed based on the themes that emerged from the present study. Quantitative studies on the relationship between Korean Americans’ colonial mentality, color-blind ideology, racial identity, and bicultural identity would contribute to building theoretical models of how U.S. imperialism impacts bicultural Koreans’ identity.

To summarize, themes from the present study highlighted how U.S. imperialism, including power dynamics between the U.S. and Korea, and between White Americans and ethnic Koreans within the U.S., influenced the identity negotiation of the bicultural Koreans in this study. These themes had implications for theory and psychotherapy with bicultural Koreans, including the need to attend to the colonial mentality of bicultural
Koreans in negotiating their identity.
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Appendix A

Focus Group Stimulus A

As Koreans living in the U.S., many of us have experiences of being treated as foreigners and, in subtle ways, as being “less than” White Americans. Although these experiences are shaped by many things, we can think of these discrimination experiences—whether overt or subtle—as related to the difference in power between Korea and the U.S. This difference in power is both historical and current. Historically, post-Japanese colonial rule, the U.S. actively participated in reorganizing the South Korean government, their policies, their military, their economy, and even education, as part of a larger agenda to ward off communism and maintain a worldwide capitalist economy and U.S.-centered global politics. Currently, although Korea is seen as an ally to the U.S., we are still not an ally on equal footing. This can be seen in the difference between the two countries in terms of negotiation power. The American military presence in Korea and the preeminence placed on the English language are just a couple of ways in which U.S. dominance is still all too present in Korea. Moreover, Korea is still perceived by many in the U.S. as a “less developed” country. The subtle message that “American” is superior is instilled through various outlets, including the media.

Additionally, the U.S. has a long history of racism. Although this history is most often thought of in terms of Black and White, Asians have historically played a significant role. From the first Chinese immigrants, Asians have been a source of cheap
labor, a kind of alternative to slavery. Asians have also served as foils to the “problem of Blacks in America.” That is, Asians are often touted as the “model minority,” held as examples of a minority group that has worked hard and succeeded, implicitly sending the message that if only Black people would work as hard as those Asians, they too could make it, ignoring the different histories of the two groups. At the same time, Asians are “perpetual foreigners” in the U.S. Although they are the “model minority,” they are also seen as not quite American. This is why Asians are often asked “Where are you from? No, I mean, where are you really from?”

Within this context, whether we are conscious of it or not, our sense of identity is likely to be complicated. Our identification with Korean culture and Korean people as well as our identification with American culture and Americans is likely influenced by messages we receive about Korea as a less powerful, less developed, less democratic, perhaps “exotic” country with strange/mystical/eccentric customs, as well as messages about how Koreans are perceived in the U.S.—hard-working, smart, but not completely one of “us” (i.e., not like White people). We have to navigate these various messages and perceptions as well as our internalized beliefs about what is valuable, good, normal, acceptable, etc. to create a sense of our identity. We might unconsciously internalize the belief that American is better or we may react against this belief and actively embrace our Korean identity. This process of negotiating our identity may be ongoing, and our identity as Korean or American may change across situations and across time. We may identify as both Korean and American, but there may be subtle shifts in emphasis between the Korean and American parts of our identity because of messages that are
created in the context of the power difference between Korea and the U.S. and the context of race and racism in the U.S.

Appendix B

Focus Group Stimulus B

In my earliest memories, I am sitting crosslegged on the counter next to our kitchen sink, watching my mother rinse cabbage she had soaked in salt the night before. After patting the leaves dry, she slathers on the thick red pepper sauce, rubs garlic and green onion into the underarms of the cabbage, bathing it as she would one of her own children. Then, grabbing them by their dangling, leafy legs, she pushes the wilting heads into gallon size mayonnaise jars, rising up on tiptoe to punch the kimchee to the bottom of the jar, submerging them in their own juices.

The whole time, I would sneak licks as if swiping frosting from a cake. Even though my eyes watered from the taste of heat, I would still want more. I was passionate about kimchee, relishing the taste, the smell, the sting of it on my tongue.

Throughout elementary school, my sisters and I would eat kimchee every day after school. We would gather in the garage, wrestle one of the gallon-sized jars of kimchee from the outside refrigerator, and sit cross-legged around the jar as though at a campfire or a séance.

Daring each other on, we would pull out long strips that we would eat straight, without rice or water to soak up the heat and dilute the taste. Our eyes would tear and our noses start to run because it was so hot, but we could not stop. “It burns, it burns, but—mashisoo!—it tastes so good!” we would cry.
Afterward we would play the jukebox, a donation from a friend of my mother’s whose restaurant closed down, careful not to touch our eyes with our wrinkled, pepper-stained hands. It seemed as if the hot, red juice soaked through our skin and into our bones. Even after we bathed, we could still feel our fingers tingling, still taste the kimchee on them. And as my sisters and I curled into our bed at night, nestling together like sleeping does, I remember the smell lingered on our hands and breaths, the faint whiff of kimchee scenting our dreams.

We went crazy for the smell of kimchee, a perfume that lured us to the kitchen table. When my mother, preparing the table for dinner, placed the almost flourescent strips of cabbage into the serving bowls, she didn’t have to call out to us, although she always did. “Girls, come eat. Mugoyo!” she would sing. Even if we weren’t hungry, beckoned by the scent as much as her voice, we couldn’t resist a taste. Sometimes “a taste” would stretch into a two hour meal filled with “just one more” bites.

But I didn’t realize that the smell traveled with me, following me to school. One day, walking across the P.E. field, a girl I recognized from the class after mine, stepped in front of me.

“You Korean?” she asked. She narrowed eyes as brown as mine, shaped like mine, like leaves pinched up at the corners.

Thinking she could be my sister, another part Korean hapa girl, I nodded and welcomed her question with a smile.

“I thought so,” she said, sneering. Her lips scrunched upward, almost folding over her nostrils. “You smell like one.”
I held my smile, frozen, as she flitted away from me. She had punched me in the stomach with her words, knocked the breath from me so that I had nothing to say.

Over the next few days, I replayed this confrontation endlessly in my mind. In one of my fantasies, this girl mutated into a hairy Neanderthal that I karate-chopped into submission. In another version, I retorted faster than a blink: “Oh yeah? Well, you smell like a monkey.”

At the very least, I thought, I should have said something that day. Anything—a curse, a joke, a grunt—anything at all would have been better than a smile.

I just smiled. And sniffed. I smiled and sniffed as I walked to the locker room and dressed for P.E. I smiled and sniffed as I jogged around the field, trying to avoid the other girls charging after soccer balls. I smiled and sniffed as I showered and returned to class.

I became obsessed with sniffing. When no one was looking, I lifted my arms and—quick—sniffed. I held my palm up to my face and exhaled to sniff at my own breath. Maybe, every now and then, I caught a whiff of garlic or pepper. But I couldn’t tell for sure; the smell of kimchee was too much a part of me.

I decided I didn’t want to smell like a Korean. I wanted to smell like an American, which supposedly meant having no smell at all. Americans, as I learned from TV commercials and magazines, erased the scent of their bodies with cologne and deodorant, mints and mouthwash.

I erased my smell by eliminating kimchee. Despite how much I loved it, how much I craved it—my first food, my first memory—I stopped eating kimchee. I became ashamed of it and told everyone, my mother included, that I wasn’t Korean, but American.
And though at one time it was what she claimed she wanted, I have no doubts, as a mother myself now, that this rejection was painful, that it cut away at something inside of her.

(Excerpted from “The Language of Stories” by Nora Okja Keller, 2004, p. 28)
Appendix C

Focus Group Protocol

1. What is your earliest memory related to being Korean in the U.S.? How did this affect how you experienced your own identity as a Korean or American?

2. What is your earliest memory related to how Asians were treated in the U.S.? How did this affect how you experienced your identity, as an Asian, Korean, or American?

3. What conscious/unconscious beliefs or messages did you have about Korea and Koreans and America and Americans when you first came to the U.S.? Where do you think these beliefs came from? How have these beliefs changed over time, if at all? How do those beliefs/messages affect how you perceive yourself?

4. Do you perceive yourself as more Korean or American? How is this identity influenced by how White Americans view you? How is this identity influenced by how Korea, as a nation, is perceived in the U.S.? (Can you think of examples of messages you receive from others or images you see in the media about how Korea and Koreans are perceived? How did this affect your identity as a Korean or American?)

5. How does the power difference between Korea and the U.S. affect how others perceive your identity? (Can you think of an example of this?) How do others’ perceptions of you, based on this power difference, then affect how you perceive your own identity?

6. What question(s) do you think should be asked in the individual interviews regarding this topic?
Appendix D
Individual Interview Protocol

1. What were your initial and subsequent reactions to the focus group discussion?

2. Was there anything that you did not mention during the group discussion that has occurred to you since then?

3. It seemed from the group discussion that many of you felt that you could never just be American but will always be Korean American, in part because you will always be identified by others as Asian/Korean. The implicit message seemed to be that if you are a visible ethnic/racial minority, you cannot simply be American because “American” is White. Do you think there is a conscious/unconscious belief or message that “American” is White? (Why or why not?) How does that affect how you identify?

4. During the group interview there was some discussion about whether Koreans are beneficiaries of U.S. goodwill and Korea was liberated by the U.S. It seems that this belief might influence someone to have more positive feelings toward the U.S., which, in turn, might make the person more inclined to identify as American. On the other hand, if someone believes that Korea was a victim of American interests/agenda, the person might have more negative feelings toward the U.S., which, in turn, might make the person less inclined to identify as American. How might your thoughts about this issue affect your identification?
5. During the group interview, there was a brief discussion about whether what many of you identified as “ignorance-based racism” is also a systemic issue. What are your thoughts on this now? How might ignorance-based racism subtly influence your own identification?

6. During the group discussion, one member raised the question of whether you would feel the same way about your identity if Korea were “like Sudan.” What are your thoughts on that? How might your identity or identification with your own culture be affected by the international status of Korea as a nation?

7. During the group discussion, a few members mentioned how Asians or Koreans are viewed differently from other people of color because Asians tend to be viewed as people who don’t commit crimes or don’t “live off of welfare.” How might this view within the U.S. affect your identification?

8. Tell me about how your identity has evolved over time and what factors influenced that evolution.

9. Is there anything I have not asked you today that you think is important?
Appendix E

Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Minsun Lee, and I am a doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology at the University at Albany. I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study about Koreans living in the U.S. who identify with both Korean and American cultures. Specifically, I am interested in the identity negotiation of bicultural Koreans (i.e., Koreans who have internalized both Korean and American cultures) living in the U.S. and how this negotiation process may be influenced by societal factors. The results of the study will provide valuable information about bicultural Koreans’ experiences and help psychologists provide better services to bicultural Koreans.

The study would involve participating in a group discussion with 5-8 people such as yourself about your experiences. The group would meet in a location that is convenient to all participants and ensures your privacy. The discussion will last about 2 hours. Then, you will be contacted for a follow-up, individual interview with me, which will last about 45-60 minutes.

If you have lived in Korea and the U.S. for a minimum of 5 years each and are interested in participating in the study, please contact me at minsunlee.cpy@gmail.com or 518-605-5388. I would be happy to provide you with further information about the study.
Thank you so much for your consideration. I hope I will have the chance to meet and speak with you!

Appendix F
Informed Consent

Greetings!

I am a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology at the University at Albany. I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study, entitled “Exploring U.S. imperialist influences on bicultural Koreans’ identity negotiation: A qualitative study.” The study will explore the experiences of Koreans living in the U.S. who see themselves as bicultural, i.e., Koreans who have internalized both Korean and U.S. cultures. Specifically, I am interested in how bicultural Koreans form their cultural identities and how this process may be influenced by societal factors.

If you decide to participate in this study, we will set up a time to meet in a small group of 5-8 individuals who agree to participate, at a location that is convenient to you and ensures privacy. I will ask group members some questions about your experiences of living as a Korean in the U.S. The interview will take approximately two hours.

The group interview will be audiotaped, and the tapes will be transcribed and analyzed for the study. The transcription will be made available to you for review along with my tentative, preliminary analysis.

After the group meeting, I will contact you for an individual phone interview to provide an in-depth understanding of your experiences and to further develop the themes.
that emerge from the group interview. This individual interview will last about one hour and be conducted at your convenience. The individual interviews will also be audiotaped for transcription and analysis.

The audio-recordings of the group and individual interviews will be stored in a secure file cabinet, to which only I will have access. These recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Your participation at every step of this process is voluntary and confidential, and you may withdraw at any time. Any publication that results from this study will include no identifying information about you.

There is no risk to participating. However, you may experience some distress talking about your bicultural experiences. At the end of the interviews, I will provide a list of referrals for mental health providers, should you wish to speak to a professional about your experiences.

Although you will not receive any direct benefit from this study, I anticipate that my results will contribute to psychologists’ knowledge of bicultural identity negotiation for Koreans residing in the U.S. As society becomes increasingly diverse, multicultural issues are of central importance for psychologists who both write about the experience of biculturalism and who work with bicultural clients in all kinds of settings.

The results of the study will be sent to you for your review and feedback. As a small token of appreciation for your participation in the study, I am offering you a $25 gift certificate to Target for the group interview and for the subsequent individual interview, with a possible total remuneration of $50 for the group interview and
individual interview.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, the Institutional Review Board, the sponsor of the study (e.g. NIH, FDA, etc.) and University or government officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me, at the email address or phone number below, or my dissertation co-chairs, Myrna L. Friedlander, Ph.D., at mfriedlander@uamail.albany.edu or (518) 442-5049, or Alex L. Pieterse, Ph.D., at apieterse@albany.edu or (518) 442-5039

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Research Compliance at 800-365-9139 or orrc@uamail.albany.edu.

One copy of this document will be kept together with the research records of this study. Also, you will be given a copy to keep.

Sincerely,

Minsun Lee, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate
Division of Counseling Psychology
Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology
University at Albany
State University of New York
I, ________________________________, have been informed of my rights as a participant and agree to participate in the study.

______________________________   ___________________
Participant                     Date
Appendix G

Summary Sent to Participants for Feedback

Statement of the Problem

Biculturalism involves the internalization of two cultures or the alternation, fusion, or integration of two cultural frames. This process is impacted by cultural power disparity because asymmetrical power dynamics can potentially create greater conflicts, both interpersonally and internally, for the bicultural individual. These difficulties, in turn, will likely influence the alternation, fusion, or integration of two cultural frames as well as the individual’s sense of their cultural identities. However, the ways in which cultural power disparity influences bicultural identity has not yet been researched.

Research Questions

The aim of this study was to examine how (a) the asymmetrical power dynamics between the U.S. and Korea on the global stage, and (b) the asymmetrical power dynamics between Whites and Koreans within the U.S. influence bicultural Koreans’ sense of identity.

Results

The analysis of the focus group and individual interviews resulted in 12 overarching themes: (a) Immigrant Experience/Foreigner Status, (b) Racialization, (c) Racism, (d) Racial Triangulation, (e) Color-Blind Ideology, (f) Individualistic Ideology, (g) False Consciousness, (h) Critical Consciousness, (i) U.S. Imperialism/Colonial
Mentality, (j) Emotions/Affect, (k) Intersectionality, (l) Negotiation of Self-Identity. Each of these themes were comprised of several subthemes.

Taken together, these results suggest that participants are deeply impacted by cultural power dynamics in various ways: (a) Individuals’ experiences as immigrants involved a process of losing their sense of belonging, power, and voice, and accepting the demand to assimilate to mainstream, predominantly White culture; (b) Individuals had various experiences of (consciously and unconsciously) seeing themselves as racial beings, in part because they were racialized by others, who were predominantly White; (c) Individuals experienced interpersonal and systemic racism and made sense of these experiences by developing a stronger identity as a Korean/Asian or denying the prevalence of these experiences or seeking safety in the Korean American community; (d) Individuals were pulled into the racial triangulation, in which Asians, as the model minority, are pitted against other people of color, who “live off of welfare,” and yet as Asians are not fully accepted because of their “perpetual foreigner” status; (e) Individuals endorsed a color-blind ideology, the hegemonic ideology around race in the U.S., i.e., the belief that race does not matter, which serves to invalidate and thereby perpetuate systemic racism within the U.S.; (f) Individuals endorsed an individualistic ideology, the hegemonic ideology in the U.S. that serves to perpetuate the myth of the American dream and decontextualizes individuals’ experiences and invalidates their experiences with systemic oppression; (g) Individuals’ narratives belied a false consciousness, i.e., an acceptance of oppressive beliefs that serve to perpetuate minorities’ own oppression and maintain the status quo; (h) At the same time, Individuals’ narratives underscored a
critical consciousness, i.e., awareness of oppressive realities and a desire to change those realities; (i) individuals spoke of the ways in which other identities, such as age and gender, intersect with their racial and cultural identities; (j) individuals’ narratives manifested various beliefs about the superiority of the U.S. vs. the inferiority of Korea, (k) all of the above beliefs and experiences led to various strategies of self-identification, including at times identifying more strongly as American or Korean.