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Transforming culture and identity:

Transnational adoptive families and heritage language learning

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Abstract

This study examines narratives of four white, English-speaking American mothers who have been learning Korean, the birth language of their adopted children, at community Korean schools. By drawing on in-depth interviews and employing narrative analysis, this study explores the mothers' motivations for studying Korean, experiences at the community schools, and strategies for promoting Korean at home. The narratives show that the mothers viewed learning Korean as: (1) a requirement for a positive racial identity; (2) a burden that parents should bear with children; (3) a way to connect with birth/foster families. These discourses help the mothers to construct their positions as parents of transnational adoptees and reveal the ideological processes at play in heritage language learning for these families. They show the mothers' beliefs in not only promoting cultural identification for the child but also reinterpreting their own racial and cultural identity. The mothers' accounts also showed that they negotiated practical aspects of

language learning at the community schools (e.g., forming separate classes for adoptees, adjusting teachers' expectations for language outcome) and created additional opportunities for language practice through Korean-speaking extracurricular teachers and Korean popular culture. This article discusses implications of these findings for community heritage language schools.

Key Words: transnational adoption, adoptive parents, family language policy, heritage language, racial identity, Korean

Word Count: 9,853

Introduction

Transnational adoption in the U.S. began about sixty years ago in the aftermath of the Korean War. Between 1953 and 1962, approximately 15,000 foreign-born children, most of them Korean, were adopted by American families (Simon & Altstein, 2000). This first wave of adoptees was followed by hundreds of thousands of children from around the world adopted into U.S. homes. American citizens adopted 265,677 children from other countries in the three decades between 1971 and 2001 (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2002) and an additional 179,711 children between 2002 and 2011 (U.S. Department of State, 2012). Although the rate of intercountry adoptions in the U.S. has dropped somewhat in recent years, foreign-born adoptees and their families are a significant and visible part of American society.

In the past, most transnational adoptees grew up in white middle-class American homes with little exposure to their birth language and culture (Kim, 2010). Parents and adoption agencies in earlier decades generally acted on the belief that adoptees should make a "clean break" from their past and grow up as Americans (Jacobson, 2008). In the "clean break" model, the child's birth parents were figuratively erased out of existence and the cultural and racial identities of the children were symbolically "replaced" by those of the adoptive parents (Melosh, 2002). White American families adopting non-white children from overseas were simply perceived to be driven by good intentions of providing a loving home and greater opportunities to children who would not otherwise have them in their countries of origin (Volkman, 2005). Some people liked to think that America was a colorblind society and that the adoptee's different physical appearance should not matter in his/her upbringing in a white family (Shiao & Tuan, 2008).

This way of thinking changed significantly in the 1990s when there was a major shift in the culture of adoption (Volkman, 2005). Many transracial adoptees who came of age told their stories of yearning to belong in their white adoptive communities but failing to integrate fully due to their appearance (Yngvesson, 2002). Scores of documentaries, essays, and books written by adult adoptees described their sense of isolation, confusion, and loss in growing up as the only ethnic/racial minority in a white town and never being given the chance to explore their roots and identities (e.g., Bishoff & Rankin, 1997; Trenka, Oparah, & Shin, 2006). As Volkman (2005: 5) observes, "some articulated their sense of dislocation, uncertainties about where they fit as they struggled to reconcile their outer appearance and inner sense of self, the ambiguities of simultaneously belonging and not belonging." The 1990s also saw a marked movement of adoptees back to the birth country, especially to connect with their cultural heritage through homeland tours, and to reconnect with birth families through processes of search and reunion (Yngvesson, 2012).

In terms of policy, there also came a greater recognition on the part of both sending and receiving countries of adoptees of the importance of a child's right to an identity that is rooted in his/her ethnicity and birth culture (Volkman, 2005). Signed in 1993, the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption urged countries to do whatever necessary to enable a child to remain in his or her family of origin or, if impossible, with a family in that country, and resort to transnational adoption only if the first two options are not available (Volkman, 2005). The Convention insisted on a child's right to an "identity" and to the right to "grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" (Volkman, 2005: 5). Nowadays, potential adoptive parents can expect to be

asked, “How are you going to assure that the child’s culture and ethnicity will be maintained?” (Quiroz, 2010).

Despite these developments, research shows that parents of transracial adoptees tend to minimize racial differences and follow a colorblind approach to socializing their children (Randolph & Holtzman, 2010). Although many psychological and social benefits (e.g., higher levels of self-esteem, lower feelings of marginality, greater ethnic pride, less distress, and better psychological adjustment) are associated with parents who facilitate their children’s understanding of their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Smith, McRoy, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2008), few parents actively work toward accomplishing this goal (Galvin, 2003). Given this context, the current study seeks to understand what motivates some parents to pursue an active cultural socialization agenda. Specifically, it investigates the ways in which a small number of adoptive mothers and their children are learning the children's birth language at community schools in order to gain a greater appreciation of the children's heritage. Through narrative analysis, it explores how the mothers explain and defend their decisions related to language learning and assesses to what extent knowing the heritage language can afford adoptees and their families with possibilities for developing positive racial and cultural identities. The findings of this study contribute to a growing body of research on identity formation among transnational and relocated populations (De Fina & King, 2011; Higgins & Stoker, 2011) and family language policy (Curdtt-Christiansen, 2009; Fogle, 2012; King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008; Okita, 2002).

Culture keeping, language learning

Jacobson (2008) introduced the term, 'culture keeping' to refer to practices of transnational adoptive parents who promote the maintenance of the child's birth culture once

he/she is adopted. Culture keeping may involve preparing and serving ethnic foods at home, decorating the house with cultural artifacts that represent the child's birth country, participating in cultural events sponsored by adoption agencies, enrolling children in ethnic music or dance classes, and visiting the birth country. Jacobson (2008) notes that culture keeping has become standard practice within the adoption community and that transnational adoptive parents are advised by the adoption community that their children should engage in their native cultures. But the extent to which adoptive parents engage in culture keeping practices varies widely. Jacobson (2008) found that parents who adopt children from a different race are more likely to spend greater efforts on culture keeping - white mothers with Chinese adoptees practiced more culture keeping than did white mothers with Russian adoptees.

One aspect of culture keeping that has not received much attention in the adoption literature is the learning of the birth language by adoptees and adoptive families. In one of the few available studies on this topic, Fogle (2012) investigated the role of language in constructing family identity in three American families that have adopted children from Russia. She showed that some of the parents of older Russian adoptees in her study spoke Russian to help ease the children's transition to life in the U.S. The parents' use of Russian helped with the children's academic work in English, and enabled them to maintain ties to their birth culture and extended family members in Russia. In a related study, Fogle (in press) found that some parents who have adopted older children from Russia learned Russian and even used that language exclusively in the initial periods of adopting. She states that bringing the children's first language into the adoptive home validates their past knowledge and experiences and helps adoptees find a healthy sense of belonging both in the new family and in their place of origin. She suggests that making

heritage language maintenance an important part of family life, and not just the responsibility of the individual child, can help to construct a new, transnational adoptive family identity.

Family language policy

Family language policy can be defined as "explicit and overt planning in relation to language use within the home among family members" (King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008: 907). Family language policies, like macro societal language policies, are shaped by beliefs and ideas about language (Spolsky, 2004) and are influenced by what the family believes will best serve the family members' goals in life (Curd-Christiansen, 2009). According to King *et al.* (2008), family language policy takes into account what families actually do with language in daily interactions; their beliefs and ideologies about language and language use; and their goals and efforts to shape language use and learning outcomes. King *et al.* (2008) argue that family language policy is particularly relevant for heritage language researchers and practitioners because it helps them understand why some immigrant groups maintain their language while others lose theirs.

Family language policy also provides "a window into parental language ideologies, thus reflecting broader societal attitudes and ideologies about both language(s) and parenting" (King *et al.*, 2008: 209). In a study of Chinese immigrant families in Quebec, Curd-Christiansen (2009) showed that while the parents believed in the importance of children's mastery of English and French for social and economic advancement in Canadian society, they also considered literacy in Chinese to be necessary for accessing culturally significant aspects of knowledge. To the parents, the Chinese language served as a mediator for Chinese culture and values, without which one could not be identified as Chinese. Consequently, the parents sought to foster

children's development of a Chinese identity through participation in weekend Chinese language schools.

Parental language ideologies are also linked to other aspects of parenthood, including notions of what makes a 'good' or 'bad' parent (King & Fogle, 2006). In a study of U.S. families who are attempting to achieve bilingualism in Spanish and English, King and Fogle (2006) found that the parents, many of whom were non-native speakers of Spanish, often referred to bilingualism as a 'gift' that they wished to impart to children. As the parents explained and justified their family language policies, they simultaneously constructed themselves as 'good' parents who were committed to providing this opportunity for their children. Similarly, Okita (2002) described how conceptions of the 'good mother' influenced bilingual parenting practices among Japanese mothers living in England with English spouses. She reported that while the mothers believed that developing bilingual skills would be beneficial for their children, they did not find the actual process of bilingual childrearing 'natural' (Okita, 2002: 222). Some mothers felt that creating a social network that was necessary to sustain Japanese use was manipulative and artificial, while others were ambivalent about using Japanese in front of English speakers or their English-speaking spouses. Because Japanese use was seen to be contingent on children's 'normal' English development in preparation for school, the mothers obsessed over monitoring children's speech for signs of difficulty, which led to stress and anxiety.

Community heritage language schools

Attaining proficiency in the adoptee's birth language remains an idealistic goal for many transnational adoptive families. In a study of online forums for adoptive mothers, Quiroz (2010) found that while many parents engaged in some form of culture keeping in their homes, they

considered learning the child's heritage language either too difficult or impractical. For example, one mother responding to the question, "How much cultural socialization is enough?" stated, "Of course we will never ignore that our daughter was born in China but we will not 'shove' it down her throat either. We will discuss her birth country with her and I hope to return with her to China one day... I will do my best to learn a few common terms before we go to China to get her but I will NOT learn a whole new language" (Quiroz, 2010: 199; emphasis in the original). Adoptive parents have also been actively advised not to use the child's first language by speech therapists or are simply assumed to have no access to the language (see Gindis, 2004).

Even if parents do have the desire to learn the child's birth language, many face the problem of locating a suitable language program. Opportunities to study the language as a family are limited, and adoptive parents often turn to community-based weekend heritage language schools, which provide mother-tongue instruction for children of immigrants for few hours a week. One of the chief goals of heritage language schools is cultural reproduction - these schools are often formed out of a community's desire to pass on its native language and culture to future generations and to maintain connections within families and communities (Kelleher, 2010). Consequently, parents are frequently called on to serve as language experts and cultural informants. Li (2005) observes that in many Chinese schools, parents' service contributes to almost all aspects of the program, including teaching, administration, and community service. In this context, adoptive parents must negotiate what it means to be "involved" in their children's language education. Since they do not speak the language, adoptive parents can neither help with children's homework nor appreciate how much language their children are able to learn in these programs. They may also encounter problems in relating to heritage parents, teachers, and staff whose cultural expectations and ideas about parenting may be vastly different from their own.

Another difficulty for adoptive families is that the majority of heritage language programs are designed for children who hear and speak the language at home with family members. But since adoptees and adoptive parents have little regular exposure to the language in question, they often find it difficult to keep up with class work with traditional heritage language learners (Lee & Shin, 2008). Moreover, most teachers at community schools are first generation immigrants and tend to teach the way they were taught in their home countries. Few teachers have received professional language teacher training and know how to tailor their instruction to the learning styles of children educated in American schools (Liu, Musica, Koscak, Vinogradova, & López, 2011). Rote learning and drills are common, and students are often turned off by teaching techniques and materials that have little direct relevance to their lives. Teachers may also overestimate students' language learning capacity and try to cover excessive amounts of material or assign too much homework, and place an undue emphasis on language accuracy, which can be discouraging to students (Lee & Shin, 2008). In addition, most heritage language programs cater to school-age children with varying proficiencies in the language, and adult classes for true beginners are less common. It is no wonder then, that most adoptees and adoptive parents drop out of these programs after few years.

Despite these challenges, a small percentage of adoptees and adoptive parents continue studying the heritage language in community schools for longer periods of time. What are the language learning motivations of these families? What contributes to their resilience as language learners? How do they negotiate their roles as parents and students in the community schools? What obstacles do they face and what strategies have they used to overcome them? How can their experiences benefit different types of families who wish to incorporate the heritage

language in family interactions? What are the curricular implications for heritage language schools? The current study addresses these questions.

Methods and participants

The data for this study come from a larger study on heritage language learning by transnational adoptees. In the larger study, 17 U.S. parents (11 with adopted children from Korea and 6 with adopted children from China) were recruited through my personal and professional contacts, emails through adoptive family networks, and community-based Korean and Chinese language schools. This was not a representative sample of adoptive parents in the U.S. To be eligible for the larger study, the participants had to have at least one adopted child either currently or previously enrolled in community-based Korean or Chinese language programs. The data for the current study come from my interviews with four mothers who, in addition to sending their children to Korean schools, have studied Korean in community schools for four or more years. One father of Chinese adoptees, who is not included in the current study, has studied Chinese for three years but all of his coursework has been at the university where he teaches as a professor, not at a community school. None of the remaining 12 parents in the larger study studied their adopted child(ren)'s heritage language.

My exclusive focus on mothers' perspectives in this study is based on the observation that the work of socializing children and educating them about their cultural heritage is primarily carried out by women in our society (Stacey, 1996; Stack & Burton, 1993). Moreover, in transnational adoptive families, Jacobson (2008: 8) notes that "culture keeping is not shared by men and women but rather is experienced as a distinct *mothering* duty." Mothers have also been shown to be better sources of concrete information about the details of the day-to-day lives of

children than fathers (Lareau, 2000). Thus, an examination of how these mothers conceptualize their cultural identities and structure language learning for themselves and their children is likely to lead to important insights about language practice in transnational adoptive families.

All four mothers are native English-speaking white Americans with no prior knowledge of Korean before adoption (see Table 1). All four women are college-educated, have full-time jobs outside the home, and are married to white American men. The six children were adopted from Korea as infants before their first birthdays, and none of the parents had biological children. Except for Carol and Diane who have known each other for several years and attend the same community Korean school in New York City, the participants do not know one another. Neither did I know any of the participants before this study began. Unlike many adoption researchers who are either adoptive parents or adoptees themselves, I have no personal connections to the adoption community. But I am a heritage Korean speaker and a mother of two American-born Korean children. For more than ten years, I have been involved in community Korean schools as a parent and a researcher.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

With the exception of Susan who has a grownup daughter and is currently not attending a Korean language program, the other three mothers are presently taking adult Korean classes at community schools. Culture keeping figures prominently in the day-to-day lives of Carol, Diane, and Sheryl. In addition to their weekly attendance at the community schools, these three mothers spend considerable amount of time during the week on activities related to Korean language and culture (e.g., shopping for Korean food, doing Korean homework, having online conversation sessions with Korean teaching assistants, and participating in cultural activities sponsored by adoptive family organizations). In all four families, the mothers did the majority of the work

associated with culture keeping. The fathers, while being quite supportive of promoting Korean culture within the family, generally engaged less with language learning than the mothers.

As can be seen in Table 1, each participant has learned other languages (e.g., Spanish, French, German, or Chinese as a foreign language, Hebrew for religious education). Diane, who had the least amount of foreign language experience, stated that learning languages is "only slightly easier for me than math - which I am terrible at" and added that she got a "D" in Spanish in college. The other three women, on the other hand, displayed more aptitude for language learning. Carol learned Chinese as an Asian studies major in college, while German was part of Sheryl's double major. Susan studied Hebrew as part of Jewish religious education (grades 2-8) and learned French in secondary school (5 years) and in college (2 years). However, none of the mothers claimed fluency in any language other than English. All four women considered Korean a difficult language to learn, especially as an adult. In fact, after 4+ years of studying Korean in community schools, the women considered their Korean language skills to be still "very limited" and "extremely simplistic".

To generate the language learning histories and perspectives of the mothers, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews adapting an Expressive Autobiographical Interview (EAI) approach (Wallace, 2001). The EAI blends an autobiography technique with a structured expressive interview method to draw out the participant's view of reality as it relates to a desired topic. The interviewer develops questions around the topic and directs these questions at the participants during crucial points of the participant's narrative account. The questions were related to each participant's reasons for studying Korean, perceptions of individual and family identities, self-claimed proficiencies in Korean, and experiences at the community schools (see

Appendix). The individual interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Narrative analysis of heritage language learning and adoptive family identity

I employ narrative analysis (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) to examine how the adoptive mothers discuss their family language policies and language learning experiences at community schools. As narratives reflect and reproduce social realities and relationships, narrative analysis can shed light on ways in which individuals position themselves with respect to discourses about language, culture, and identity (De Fina & King, 2011). Narratives produced within interviews are especially powerful sites for the construction of identity and the representation of social relationships (Schiffrin, 1996), because interviews are 'theatres for the negotiation of locally constructed identities by participants vis-à-vis each other and the topics discussed' (De Fina, & King, 2011: 167). Talmy and Richards (2011) conceptualize interviews as socially-situated 'speech events', in which interviewers and interviewees make meaning, co-construct knowledge, and participate in social practices. The narratives that the adoptive mothers produce in the interviews often point to processes related to the formation of transnational adoptive families, as well as discourses and ideologies about childrearing, culture, and racial identity. These discourses then shape the local construction of identities since the interviewer and interviewee engage with notions of what it means to be a mother, a (Korean) American, white, researcher, and language learner, and negotiate the images that they wish to impress upon each other.

An important notion that I draw from for narrative analysis here is the concept of 'positioning', which refers to the ways in which narrators manage their identity through

storytelling (Bamberg, 1997; Davies & Harré, 1990). According to Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008), positioning can be analyzed at three levels through an examination of how the narrator locates him/herself in relation to: other characters in the narrative (level 1); to the interlocutor or interviewer (level 2); to dominant discourses or 'master narratives' (level 3). Developing this concept, Wortham (2001) proposed that certain linguistic structures (e.g. indexicals) and strategies (e.g. quoted speech, constructed dialogue) function as positioning cues. He showed that by identifying these cues and analyzing how the narrator positions him/herself with respect to the socially relevant types of characters being presupposed, one can examine the interactional positioning in a narrative. Following this method, I analyzed the mothers' retellings of experience and evaluative comments that revealed their positioning toward their identity negotiation.

Analysis

In the following, I first explore the mothers' motivations for learning Korean. I then discuss how the women negotiate language learning in the community schools and promote Korean at home. Overall, learning Korean is framed as: (1) a requirement for a positive racial identity; (2) a burden that parents should bear with children; (3) a way to connect with birth/foster families. These discourses help the mothers to construct their positions as parents of transnational adoptees and reveal the ideological processes at play in heritage language learning for these families. They show the mothers' beliefs in not only promoting cultural identification for the child but also reinterpreting racial and cultural identity for the family.

Motivations for studying Korean

The mothers in this study wanted their children to develop a positive racial identity, which, they predicted, would prepare the children for encounters with racism. In Excerpt 1, Sheryl describes her desire for her son to develop 'a broader Asian American identity' and positions herself against other adoptive parents who downplay the child's different racial background. By animating what she has heard them say ('well, you know, race doesn't matter, we're colorblind.') and negating their assessment ('If your child leaves that house, people say an Asian.' 'They see an Asian person.'), she argues that it is unreasonable for white parents to ascribe an 'honorary white' identity to their adopted Korean children. Her evaluation that 'people have to negotiate their way as racial minorities in this country' portrays racism as a bitter reality ('there's no way to sugarcoat it'), which a 'good' parent must help the child contend with. This sets in motion her predicament that she, as a white person, cannot draw from personal experience to guide her son. However, by assisting his learning of Korean, she can cultivate a strong Asian American identity, which, in Jacobson's (2008: 67) words, can give him a "'protective shield' of a sort to rely upon when dealing with racial identity issues". Sheryl's learning of Korean, then, serves to mitigate her 'limitations as a white adoptive parent'.

Excerpt 1

Sheryl: I want to help him develop sort of a broader Asian American identity. Because I think a lot of adoptive parents have this idea, "well, you know, race doesn't matter, we're colorblind"... "okay, in your house, maybe you are. If your child leaves that house, people say an Asian. They do not see an honorary white person, okay? They don't. They see an Asian person." So people have to negotiate their way as racial minorities in this country. And there's no way to sugarcoat it. And being part of the dominant race myself, I cannot pass anything on from my

experiences... I realize my limitations as a white adoptive parent. I cannot pass on, like, "oh, I had this racist experience happened to me and this is how I dealt with it." Because I haven't had that.... I decided that I need to learn Korean and about Korean culture to help my son learn Korean and Korean culture because I realized there is no way that I could just send my kid to language school and I don't speak the language.

The mothers' perspectives on race went beyond promoting cultural identification for the children. In Excerpt 2, Carol's evaluative comment, partly directed toward other adoptive families as a piece of advice, reveals her belief that adoptive families need to construct their identity as a family. Her characterization of her family as "half Korean American" is similar to that of the white adoptive mothers in Volkman's (2005) study whose culture keeping practices made it possible for them to claim hybrid identities (e.g., Asian American). But her use of the word 'half' softens her claim to a 'full' Korean American identity in the presence of a Korean American interviewer. Carol then shifts from being an evaluator to a storyteller and illustrates how her family embraces this hybrid identity in everyday life. Her narrative about watching the Olympics together as a family is very fitting as cultural identity is often manifested in the type of sports team that one roots for during international competitions. That the family cheers for both the USA and Korea is a clear expression of a hybrid identity, and her description of the internal conflict resulting from discovering a Korean pitcher on the opponent's team further strengthens her claim that her family is Korean American.

Excerpt 2

Carol: I think as an adoptive family, your whole life changes. You have to find an identity as a family... We completely consider ourselves a half Korean American family... So we had to figure out how to embrace that and make it part of our everyday life... So when we watch the Olympics, we're torn between... we root for the USA and Korea. If we watch baseball and there's a Korean pitcher on the other team, we kind of don't know what to do because of the Korean pitcher.

Similarly, Susan's narrative in Excerpt 3 points to transformations of family identity that take place in transnational adoptive families. Characterizing parent-child interaction as 'a two-way relationship', Susan argues that parents need to adapt to their children's ways just as children have to adapt to the parents' ways. To illustrate her point, she produces a hypothetical case in which a parent discovers her child's food allergies and is compelled to cook differently. Implied in this cooking analogy is the idea that parents who love their child would surely make this adjustment, knowing well that not doing so would bring harm to the child. Susan then talks specifically about the need for adoptive parents to acknowledge the child's past. She rejects a dominant discourse about adoption in the earlier decades, namely that children are adopted as 'blank slates' without prior knowledge or experience. She portrays the act of learning the child's first language as a recognition of the child's past culture and history, which translates to a love for the child.

Excerpt 3

Susan: When kids come into our lives, it's a two-way relationship... They don't just absorb things from you. You absorb things from them. Even if let's say, you have to change because it turns out your kid has food allergies and you have to cook

differently. You know, I mean whatever that is, it's a two-way relationship. And I think that when we adopt children, just as we have our past, our children are coming with baggage, they have a culture and a history that, even if it was very brief, that existed before their adoption. And I think we have to pay attention to that. And we have to connect to it, so we can help them connect to it...Children are not adopted as blank slates. I think there has to be recognition of that. And language is one piece of that.

Language learning, as other forms of culture keeping, requires a significant investment of time and energy. In order to accommodate Korean school and homework, family priorities often have to be reorganized, and other extracurricular and leisure activities that parents find important may need to be dropped. In Excerpt 4, Diane frames attending Korean school on Saturdays as a 'burden' and a 'huge sacrifice' that the family must bear together. A series of rhetorical questions bolsters her argument that adoptive parents should learn the language with the children. She then describes her interactions with other adoptive parents who expect only the child to make the cultural adjustments of belonging in a multiracial family. Characterizing these interactions as 'really depressing' and 'really upsetting', she reconstructs a conversation in which she challenges other parents to imagine being the only white persons in a room full of Asians. When these parents point out the rarity of such occasions ('when are you the only round eye in the room?'), Diane responds by saying 'all the time', and specifies Asian-dominated social settings in which she finds herself in the minority. Her evaluative comment ('I don't think my kids should have to be the only people who are uncomfortable...') justifies her motivation to seek out opportunities to socialize with Koreans and to study Korean.

Excerpt 4

Diane: Why should only this child have to bear this burden?... Why would you ask the kids to take on a huge sacrifice on Saturday morning and not be willing to do it yourself?... If you're a multicultural family, doesn't that mean that all of your racial identities have to be reorganized, not just your child's? Like you're asking them to accommodate you but you're not going to change your cultural orientation at all? We're often in situations with other adoptive families who kind of don't do this at all and it's really depressing and it's really upsetting. And I'll say something like, "well, you know, just imagine how your kids feel at the school. Think about how you'd feel when you're the only round eye in the room." And they're all so like, "when are you the only round eye in the room?" I'm like, "all the time, like at half of my friends' birthday parties, at the pediatrician's, at Korea school." You know, I don't think my kids should have to be the only people who are uncomfortable in the sense that we're this visible multicultural family. I have to bear half the discomfort, or more.

Jacobson (2008) observes that adoptive mothers rely on the idea that adoptees suffer from adoption-related loss and that by engaging in culture, their children can connect to what they lost through abandonment and adoption. In the same way, the mothers in this study were eager to help their children connect to their lost culture and kin. In Excerpt 5, Diane explains that her son's motivation to study Korean stems from his desire to be able to speak to his birth mother in the future. She then recounts her family's trip to Korea the previous summer, which included visits with the foster families that cared for the children until they were adopted. Through quoted

speech, Diane explains how Megan was able to communicate with her Korean-speaking foster mother using rudimentary Korean. But this meeting triggered the child's yearning to be able to 'really talk' and express her feelings more fully in Korean. Diane's evaluative comment here ('This is about them wanting to maintain some sense of connection to people who are actually missing from their lives.') acknowledges the children's longing to bond with their lost kin and serves to justify her efforts to promote Korean in the family.

Excerpt 5

Diane: If you ask my son why he goes to Korea school, he will tell you it's because he would like to be able to speak to his birth mother one day... We got to visit their foster families this summer when we were in Korea in August and Megan was very happy. [She said to me,] "you know, I realized how much Mrs. Ahn (her foster mother) loved me and how much we could talk without using language, without my being able to say much, and say 'thank you' and 'I love you' and 'please may I have'"... She could understand little pieces of things. But she said, "it would be so much nicer when I can go back and I can really talk..." This is about them wanting to maintain some sense of connection to people who are actually missing from their lives. And if they are able to make contact with them at some point, to be able to actually express something and not have to have a translator standing in the middle of that. We want to make sure that this is a possibility for them.

Negotiating language learning in the community schools

Ready with the conviction that language learning is crucial for their families, the mothers set out to study Korean at community Korean schools, where they actively negotiated the

instruction their families received. They recognized early on that their children would encounter problems keeping up with class work alongside traditional heritage language learners and worked with other adoptive families to help create separate classes for adoptees and adoptive parents.

In Excerpt 6, Diane first narrates a story about bringing several adoptive families together to form adoptee and parent classes. The positioning devices she uses in this narrative set up adoptive families (*we*) versus Korean school staff (*they*) and reveal her alignment with other adoptive families with a similar interest in learning Korean. Her sequencing of events suggests a causal relationship between the families' initiative and the school's response - Diane's recruitment of three or four adoptive families led to the school's creation of a separate class for adoptive families; three additional families joining the next week prompted the school to create a parents' class. She then shifts from being a narrator to an evaluator and explains why a 'regular Korea school' does not suit adoptive families. Here, she positions adoptive families (*we*) against traditional heritage learners (*they*) who speak Korean with family members at home. Since adoptees do not have this opportunity, they would naturally find learning Korean in the same class with traditional heritage learners an 'extraordinarily frustrating experience'.

Excerpt 6

Diane: Eventually what happened was I contacted three or four other adoptive families that we knew with kids the same age and brought them in. So they made a separate class for us. The next week, I think three other families showed up. They made a separate class for our 5-year-old boys and then there was a class for, they put us in the adults', the parents' class. So we all learn at the same time but in separate rooms... We knew we didn't want to go to a regular Korea school because

our kids, we're going to find out it's extraordinarily frustrating experience. They are getting double the practice. They get to go home and talk to their *halmonis* (grandmothers) and... they get to talk to their parents... they get to have it reinforced in a way that would be really impossible for our families to keep up with.

Once the classes started, the mothers sought to give the children a positive language learning experience by educating school staff about the specific needs of adoptees and adoptive families. In Excerpt 7, Carol relates a story about a new teacher at the school who used to assign excessive amounts of homework, much to the chagrin of the students. Her quoted complaint positions the adoptive parents (*we*) as a united front against this practice and reveals conflicting goals of the parents and the school staff. While the parents' main goal is for children to enjoy learning Korean and develop a positive appreciation for Korean culture, the teachers and administrators are more concerned with 'making faster progress with the language'. In this case, the parents' wish had prevailed and the teacher 'backed off on homework'. Carol then describes how Dr. Hwang, the principal of the school and also her teacher in the adult class, reacted to this change. As Dr. Hwang expresses her dissatisfaction with the teacher, Carol defends the teacher by arguing that traditional, drills-based lessons would make the children lose interest in Korean. By positioning *the kids* (not the parents) as agents and portraying their potential decision to 'stop coming' as irrevocable ('the whole game is over'), she makes a powerful case for accommodating the children's wishes.

Excerpt 7

Carol: This new teacher had backed off on homework because that was part of the kids' resentment... We sort of had to express to them, "Look, we're just glad our kids are showing up. We're glad they're getting some exposure. We're not concerned that they're not going fast enough. We just want them to like it."... My teacher, actually, Dr. Hwang, came into my room... and was lamenting that the little kids weren't going fast enough... And she was kind of suggesting that she didn't think the teacher was working out. And I had to say, "Dr. Hwang, the families love him. Please don't even consider making a change. I don't think the kids care that they're not making faster progress with the language..." I said, "Please, you mustn't think that a more rigid lesson that's gonna move them along faster [is better]... If the kids decide to stop coming, the whole game is over."

The mothers' negotiations at Korean school were not only with the school staff but also with their children. Many heritage students resent being made to forego other extracurricular or leisure activities on the weekend to make room for language instruction that they often find tedious (Lee & Shin, 2008). Children's reluctance to attend community schools also comes from the fact that public education systems generally view work done in these schools as extraneous and unrelated to mainstream education (Liu *et al.*, 2011). In Excerpt 8, Carol describes her struggles with her children's resistance to Korean school. She first constructs a dialogue in which her 10-year-old son, Andy, declares that he will not learn Korean because he will 'never use it'. Rather than disagree with him right away, she acknowledges that he could be right and coaxes him to 'try it one more month'. While her tone is conciliatory with Andy, her next story involving 13-year-old Emily describes a clear confrontation between the mother and her daughter. Carol's

statement that she was 'in tears or almost in tears' prefaces an emotional showdown in which she gives Emily an ultimatum to 'decide right now' whether she will continue with Korean school. The conflict is resolved when Emily 'did not choose to come home' and Carol promises to do fun activities after Korean school. Thus, by cajoling, pressuring, and pleading with the children, Carol manages their resistance to Korean school.

Excerpt 8

Carol: Andy gets so annoyed, he has tantrums, he shouts, "I won't ever learn, I'll never use it." And I say, "Well, that's possible. You may not." [Then he says,] "So I don't know why I have to." And I go, "I know, let's just see. Can we try it one more month?"... I stood on the street... it was just Emily going at that point and so Andy was in the soccer season. And Emily was bridling and saying she didn't want to go and I literally, I think I was in tears or almost in tears and I just stood on the street and I said, "You have to decide right now. I'm not going through this anymore. You have to make a decision. Yes or no? But I'm not fighting every Saturday." It was, it was terrible. It was a big emotional, near tears, or both of us in tears. And actually, she did not choose to come home. That was key. It was kind of like, "Okay, then we're gonna go, and we'll have lunch after, and we'll go shopping for Korean snacks, and we'll go to the bookstore and look through all the cool knick-knacks."... I bribe them with the bakery and that kind of thing.

Promoting Korean at home

Securing opportunities to practice Korean outside the classroom is a significant challenge for adoptive families without a daily exposure to the language. To address this problem, the

women in this study have found some creative solutions. Some immigrant parents purposefully seek out Korean-speaking music and art teachers, sports coaches, and tutors for their children to create additional domains in which use of Korean is natural and expected (Lee, Kang, & Jeong, 2011). Similarly, in Excerpt 9, Diane describes how her children's Korean school teacher also teaches them piano in their home. By first establishing the teacher's music education credentials, she differentiates him from most Korean school teachers who have never received professional teacher training. She then explains how he is 'deeply adored' by the children and is 'so much fun'. That this teacher allows the children to call him by his nickname ('Cookie Monster') and even rewards them with a sword fight upon completion of a piano piece further sets him apart from most other teachers.

Excerpt 9

Diane: The children's teacher has his masters in early childhood music education. And so he's really fun and he actually teaches my kids piano on Fridays. And so they get to learn piano and Korean, too. He's deeply adored by them. And he goes by, I guess it's his computer screen name, he goes by Cookie Monster, which they find, it's just like the funniest, happiest name... It's his nickname... He's so much fun and he plays piano with them and when they finish a piece, he rewards them with a sword fight... He's their Korean teacher at Korea school and they get to spend a day with this kind of beloved extended family member... It's been an amazing experience.

Diane's characterization of Cookie Monster as 'this kind of beloved extended family member' is reminiscent of Jacobson's (2008: 173-174) notion of "fictive kin". She states that

because adoptive families are based on nonbiological kinship, they encourage a conceptualization of kinship beyond the nuclear family - one that may include other adopted children from the same country and members of the ethnic community that are supportive of adoptees. Part of the reason Cookie Monster is so successful as a teacher is that he meets the children in their own terms. Similarly, in discussing her 'ideal' Korean language learning situation, Anne, one of the Korean adoptee-returnees in Higgins and Stoker's (2011) study, selected a Korean member of her adoption organization as a 'dream' teacher. Among his favorable attributes as a teacher, Anne particularly appreciated his 'willingness to understand her and to accept her, no matter what' (p. 408). Higgins and Stoker add that this teacher's connection with Anne's adoption organization is likely the key factor in his understanding of her emotional needs as an adult adoptee learning the language of her birth country.

In addition to Korean-speaking extracurricular teachers, the mothers exploited the appeal of Korean popular culture (e.g., popular music, drama) to expose their children to more Korean. South Korea is currently a major exporter of music, TV programming, and films to the Asia-Pacific region (Ryoo, 2009). "Hallyu," or "Korean Wave" refers to the immense popularity of South Korean popular culture in other Asian countries (Lee, Kim, & Min, 2009). For the adoptive families in this study, their consumption of Korean popular culture led to more enjoyable language learning experience. In Excerpt 10, Carol describes her daughter's enthusiasm for Korean popular music and drama. Her portrayal of Emily in this excerpt ('very in the groove at the moment and happy') is in marked contrast to the image of an exasperated teenager in Excerpt 8. Here, Carol depicts Emily as voluntarily engaging with programming in Korean ('she sticks with it, she doesn't complain') and greatly enjoying it ('she laughs and sometimes she cries', 'loves everything'). By positioning Emily as a sole agent who decides what

she will watch, Carol projects an image of a permissive parent who allows her child to pursue her interests freely. Her evaluative comment ('her accent is good and she's motivated') suggests, however, that her indulgence is justified by Emily's improved Korean accent and heightened desire to learn the language.

Excerpt 10

Carol: Emily... my 13-year-old, is very much into it... She watches Korean dramas, like on Hulu or whatever online, like a ton... And she sticks with it, she doesn't complain... Emily is very in the groove at the moment and happy... She's into like all Korean pop culture. So she watches the music videos, all the boy dance, and the girl dance, loves everything... And she loves the dramas, and she sits there at the computer and she laughs and sometimes she cries... Of course she uses subtitles but she's picking up more. And her accent is good and she's motivated.

Conclusion and Implications

Given that many parents of transnational adoptees downplay their children's racial and cultural differences (Galvin, 2003; Randolph & Holtzman, 2010), this study sought to understand what motivates some parents to do the opposite. Specifically, it investigated the ways in which four white, U.S. mothers and their Korea-adopted children are learning Korean at community schools in order to better understand the children's heritage. Drawing from research on family language policy (King, Fogle, & Logan-Terry, 2008) and using narrative analysis as a tool (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), this study explored the mothers' motivations for studying Korean, experiences at the community schools, and strategies for promoting Korean at home. Learning a new language can be a challenge for any adult, but these women have taken on the

task of studying Korean with the explicit goal of assisting their children to acquire it. The women anticipated that, by learning Korean and pursuing Korean cultural activities as a family, they would facilitate their children's development of a strong Asian American identity, which they feel is necessary for countering racism and negative social attitudes directed toward racial minorities (Jacobson, 2008). The mothers also felt that learning Korean was necessitated by the children's longing to connect with their lost kin and identify with their roots (Higgins & Stoker, 2011; Yngvesson, 2012).

The narratives also showed that the mothers' views went beyond promoting cultural identification for their children to also reinterpreting their own identities. By incorporating Korean language and culture in the daily life of the family, the mothers constructed their own positions as parents of transnational adoptees, reorganizing and reinventing their sense of self. Rejecting dominant discourses that place the burden of making cultural adjustments solely on the adopted child (Melosh, 2002), these mothers modified their own cultural identities to reflect the child's race and ethnicity. As Fogle (2012; in press) argued, by making heritage language maintenance an important part of family life, and not just the responsibility of the individual child, these mothers were able to construct a new, transnational adoptive family identity. Their learning of the child's first language is a concrete representation of this transformation of culture and identity.

At the community schools, the mothers negotiated practical aspects of language learning with Korean teachers and administrators. Recognizing that their children would encounter problems keeping up with class work alongside traditional heritage learners who speak Korean at home (Lee & Shin, 2008), the mothers worked with other adoptive families to help create separate classes for adoptees and adoptive parents. They also educated school staff about the

need for adoptees to develop a positive appreciation for Korean language and culture, not necessarily to move through the curriculum at the same speed as traditional heritage learners. Because the mothers felt that teachers' expectations for a faster progress could stifle children's interest in learning Korean, they negotiated with the teachers to adjust the expected outcomes for language competence and provide less rigid, less drills-based lessons that would sustain the children's interest in the language (Liu *et al.*, 2011). Outside of school, the mothers mobilized the resources existing in the Korean community, such as Korean-speaking extracurricular teachers and Korean popular culture, to secure additional opportunities for their families to practice Korean (Lee *et al.*, 2011). All of these efforts help to explain why these families have been able to maintain their language learning program for longer periods than most adoptive families.

Perhaps one of the most important implications to be drawn from the findings is the need for language classes that are specifically suited to the needs of adoptees and adoptive families. These classes should assume no prior knowledge of Korean and should be designed with adoptees' sociocultural needs in mind. Teachers should not only be concerned with ways in which to teach the language rules, but also with understanding the emotional needs of diverse types of heritage learners. Community schools may also offer extra homework assistance to adoptees and their families by providing teaching assistants who work with students outside of class either in person or online. Along the same lines, expected outcomes for language proficiency should reflect the degree of students' exposure to the language as well as goals. Since adoptive families often lack cultural resources and access to ethnic social networks, which provide natural contexts for language learning, community schools may also facilitate the development of friendships among adoptive and non-adoptive families.

Theme-based language curricula reflecting culturally relevant topics and diverse experiences of transracial, mixed marriage, and adoptive families could help to motivate students from different backgrounds and transform the ways in which language is taught in community schools. Currently, educating adoptees is not a major part of the community school agenda. But as the numbers of adoptees, mixed race students, and other non-traditional heritage learners continue to increase, there is a need for community schools to expand their role, from being merely keepers and transmitters of culture to being outward-looking institutions embedded in processes of transnationalism and educational change. If community schools could serve as a place where the experiences and identities of adoptive and other types of families are affirmed and celebrated, they are more likely to be successful in reaching this growing population of learners. This will in turn strengthen these schools by making them relevant not only to the ethnic communities involved but also to the larger society.

Appendix

Interview Questions

- 1) Please tell me your name, age, where you live, your occupation, and highest education.
- 2) Please tell me about your family. Spouse, partner/children – their age and where they live.
- 3) Please tell me a bit more about your child(ren). For your adopted child(ren), could you please tell me your reasons and circumstances for adoption (when, at what age, from what countries, boy or girl, etc.)?
- 4) Have your child(ren) been attending a community-based Korean language school? If so, for how long?
- 5) Have you received any classroom instruction in Korean? If so, when, for how long, where, and why?
- 6) Please share your reasons for studying Korean.
- 7) Please share your reasons for sending your child(ren) to the community language school.
- 8) How important is your children's knowledge of Korean in their growth? Why do you want them to learn Korean?
- 9) If you or your child(ren) stopped attending the community school, please tell me when and why.
- 10) How many hours of classroom instruction in Korean do you/your children receive per week at the community language school?
- 11) How many hours do you/they spend on Korean homework outside of class per week?
- 12) What is your overall impression of the community language school you/your child(ren) attend(ed)? What is good about it? What is not so good about it?
- 13) How did you/your child(ren) do in the community school? Did you/they like the school?

- 14) How much Korean did you/they learn? How proficient are you/they in Korean (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing)?
- 15) What was it like for you as a non-native Korean speaker to participate in the community school? Were there any difficulties in relating to the teachers, administrators, other parents and students? If so, what were they?
- 16) What types of support would you like to help you/your child(ren) learn Korean? What advice do you have for parents of international adoptees interested in helping their children learn Korean?
- 17) Have you/has your child visited Korea? If so, when and for how long?
- 18) Is there anything else you wish to tell me about your/your children's learning of Korean?

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Table 1: Overview of the Participants*

Name	Age	Marital Status	Place of Residence	Child(ren), Sex (Age)	Occupation	Years learning Korean	Other languages (Years studied)
Carol	51	Married	New York City	Emily, F (13), Andy, M (10)	Office manager	4	French (6); Chinese (3 ½)
Diane	47	Married	New York City	Sam, M (8), Megan, F (6)	Clinical psychologist	4	French (2); Spanish (2 ½)
Susan	58	Widowed**	Northern California	Sonia, F (23)	University admissions coordinator	5 ½	Hebrew (6+); French (7);
Sheryl	45	Married	Suburban Maryland	Michael, M (7)	Chemist	4	German (7); Spanish (2)

*All participants and children were given pseudonyms.

** Susan's husband passed away when Sonia was 10 years old.