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## Understanding the Ethnic Self: A Qualitative Study of 1.5 Generation Korean American Immigrants

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**Abstract:** This study examined the experiences of bicultural identity development of 1.5 generation Korean immigrants living in predominantly White regions. Using grounded theory methodology, this study highlights dynamic forms of 1.5 generation Korean immigrants' bicultural identities as both Korean and American. This study found that as these immigrants experience race-related discrimination and build interpersonal relationships, they develop different forms of bicultural identity through five stages (from anxiety and fear to acceptance) that differ from first- and second-generation immigrants. Through viewing 1.5 generation immigrants as a unique population with their own needs, the implications center on the opportunity to support 1.5 generation, Korean immigrants, in coping with negative experiences and developing bicultural identity across various contexts.

**Keywords:** Qualitative study, 1.5 generation immigrants, Bicultural identity development, Grounded theory method, Social-ecological model.

The Asian American (AA) population has been identified as the fastest-growing population in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2017a). The number of AAs living in the U.S. grew from 491,000 in 1960 to about 12.8 million in 2014 and is estimated to increase to 40 million by 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2017b; Saw et al., 2013). This population increase reflects the growth of the 1.5 generation, which is a distinct cohort of immigrants between first and second immigrant generations. The phrase "1.5 generation" refers to people born in their country of origin and who migrated to their host country between the ages of three and 13 years (Kraus & Castro-Martín, 2018; Li, 2021; Rumbaut, 2004). Although there are many differences depending on the age of arrival, most 1.5 generation immigrants spend their developmental years being exposed to both cultures of origin and U.S. culture. Individuals of the 1.5 generation are considered neither part of the first-generation individuals whose identities were formed in the homeland nor a part of the U.S.-born second-generation individuals (Li, 2021; Ryer, 2010). For this reason, 1.5 generation immigrants are known as "partial insiders in two distinct cultural worlds" (Ryer, 2010, p.74) with the condition of in-betweenness (Robles-Llana, 2018).

As AAs belong to more than one cultural group, they inevitably navigate the different norms, beliefs, and values between two cultural contexts. Faced with this diversity, AAs develop cultural identity by asking themselves questions of how much they identify with two cultures (Schwartz et al., 2015). Having a strong sense of identification with both heritage and mainstream culture, also known as bicultural identity, can lead to positive well-being among immigrants (Li, 2021). Studies have also revealed that bicultural identity development is associated with favorable

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psychological and behavioral outcomes of Asian immigrants (Chen et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2016; Sirikantraporn, 2017; Yamaguchi et al., 2016). For example, Korean immigrant youth who achieved bicultural identity showed a stronger bond with their parents and more positive perceptions of parental support, thereby showing less delinquent behavior and depressive symptoms compared to those who identified themselves as belonging to a single culture (Choi et al., 2016). Also, a strong orientation toward Chinese culture and American culture was positively associated with a lower risk of Chinese American youth's depression, anxiety, and other psychosomatic symptoms (Cheung & Swank, 2019). As such, bicultural identity development is important since it helps immigrants have better management of their own emotional needs and perceive more favorable psychological functioning (Chen et al., 2022; Preusche & Göbel, 2021; Schwartz et al., 2015).

Evidence suggests that 1.5 generation immigrants develop bicultural identities in a different way from the first- and second-generation immigrants (Li, 2021; Liu, 2015; Robles-Llana, 2018). For example, nativity is one component that separates 1.5 generation from second-generation immigrants. As 1.5 generation individuals acculturate to the U.S. culture, they are more likely to change their cultural values that they acquire from their home country. While second-generation immigrants tend to see their own identity as more Americanized, 1.5 generation immigrants waver between the two, which can be challenging to develop bicultural identity. Those who arrived in the U.S. in their later childhood tend to experience different curriculum structures and instructional languages in the home country, which could be additional barriers when developing a bicultural identity.

Bicultural identity development is a process that takes time and is impacted by multiple sociocultural contexts (Meca et al., 2019; Pyke & Dang, 2003; Yampolsky et al., 2013; Yu, 2017). For example, geographical location, where Korean immigrants settle down in the U.S., can largely influence their cultural identity. While Korean immigrants living in the areas with AA majority populations can maintain cultural norms and values of their culture by building co-ethnic networks and accessing resources, those who emigrate outside of these areas may have difficulty in preserving cultural heritage and values. Developing bicultural identity can be challenging for these immigrants, particularly for 1.5 generation immigrants who are in-between two different cultures.

However, research on bicultural identity among 1.5 generation Korean immigrants living in White dominant regions is limited (Kim & Agee, 2018; Son, 2013). Thus, this study seeks to add to the literature by exploring experiences of 1.5 generation Korean immigrants living in predominantly White regions of the U.S. and how they develop their bicultural identity through interactions within different socio-cultural contexts. Subsequently, we explore the following research questions:

1. How do 1.5 generation Korean immigrants in White dominant regions develop bicultural identity?
2. How is 1.5 generation Korean immigrants' development of bicultural identity influenced by interactions with parents, peers, and community members?

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Ecological Model**

To better understand 1.5 generation Korean immigrants' bicultural identity development, this study employed a social-ecological model (SEM) with an emphasis on interpersonal

interactions within multiple sociocultural contexts. SEM provides a useful framework for understanding how individual identity is socially constructed by different social meanings and interactions over time (Hawkins et al., 2021; Max et al., 2015). Adapted from and like Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory, SEM posits that there are different levels of interactions that influence identity formation, spanning from the individual context to broader societal ones, such as from intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, and public policy (Baral et al., 2013; Hawkins et al., 2021; Lyons et al., 2019). For this study, a large portion of the analysis centers on the microsystem with a specific interest in key socialization agents in intrapersonal and community settings—parents, peers, and religious community members.

## Parents

As primary support networks, parents can also serve as agents for developing bicultural identity development of their child (Lee & Gupta, 2020; Ward et al., 1977). There are multiple parenting models for immigrant parents to adopt, such as maintaining the cultural traditions of their heritage, blending an American tradition with their heritage tradition, and taking on a fully American version of parenting that is completely outside of their heritage's way of parenting (Huang et al., 2018). Most likely, as Korean parents go through a period of cultural adjustment in the U.S. while maintaining their culture, they may also adopt some American cultural beliefs (e.g., childrearing values, attitudes) and behaviors (e.g., language use, parenting practices) of the American cultural group (Huang et al., 2018; Tajima & Harachi, 2010). Therefore, more acculturated Korean parents hold values that are consistent with Americanized parenting practices, such as valuing autonomy and independence (Johnson et al., 2013). Overall, cultural adaptation and parenting cultural behaviors are also related to aspects of immigrant children's attitudes toward Asian heritage culture (Abad & Sheldon, 2008; Atzaba-Poria & Pike, 2005; Huang et al., 2018).

Furthermore, parents' attitudes and values focused on their culture of origin can lead to intergenerational differences in acculturation, thereby influencing bicultural identity development of their child (Tummala-Narra et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2016). Korean parents' parenting styles are heavily influenced by Confucian values that focus on patriarchal, authoritarian, and hierarchical family systems embedded in Korean culture (Kim & Agee, 2018). These values often conflict with the American cultural values that become the most salient to immigrant children, such as autonomy and individualism. This gap in acculturation and cultural values between parents and child is likely to increase as the child goes into adolescence (Wang et al., 2016). Research shows that the intergenerational acculturation gap is associated with poor parent-child relationship and children's low perceptions of their parental warmth (Tummala-Narra et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2016). This negative family functioning was related to children's negative attitudes toward Asian culture (Qin et al., 2008; Yoon et al., 2017).

## Peers and Community

Peer engagement and relationships can be the most salient means to determine youth's bicultural identity development (Ferrari et al., 2019; Jugert & Feddes, 2017; Yoon et al., 2017). Studies found that different types of peer relationship can contribute to minority youth's attitudes toward their culture of origin and identifications with two cultures (Chen & Graham, 2015; Kiang et al., 2011; Vietze et al., 2019; Yip et al., 2013). For example, one study examined how peers with diverse cultural backgrounds may function as socialization agents for two cultural identity dimensions (i.e., the identification with one's heritage and with the mainstream culture) and found

that youth with a lack of same-ethnic friendships showed a low sense of identification with one's heritage culture (Vietze et al., 2019). On one hand, a cross-ethnic friendship was associated with youth's higher bicultural identity dimensions favoring American culture, such as a strong out-group orientation and positive attitudes toward American culture (Kelleghan et al., 2019).

Additionally, immigrant youth's bicultural identity can be influenced by perceived peer attitudes toward minority culture and immigrants (Douglass et al., 2017; Ferrari et al., 2019; Jetten et al., 2001). For example, racial discriminatory attitudes or actions among white peers can lead minority youth to devalue their group from the society and negatively perceive their culture of origin (Jetten et al., 2001). Butler-Barnes and colleagues (2018) found that high levels of school-based racial discrimination and prejudice were associated with negative attitudes toward heritage culture and low self-pride among African American youth. Taken together, minority youth who perceive negative cultural attitudes of peers from mainstream culture may endorse preferring White peers as friends and report a weak sense of cultural identification with their heritage culture, which can threaten their bicultural identity development.

In addition to school, other community contexts, such as religious congregations, can be a part of the bicultural identity development. Youth engagement with religious congregations has been consistently noted as a place for peers to gather as well as a general space of support (e.g., reduced suicidality, reduced depression symptoms) and social identity development (Bobowik et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2015; Cole-Lewis et al., 2016). Despite some negative experiences of youth within religious congregations, they are largely seen as positive alternative spaces of emotional, cultural, and social development. Ethnicity, religious affiliation, and other identity markers dynamically interact with each other across the lifespan and help create an understanding of their overall place within the larger society (e.g., acceptance, oppression) (Alexander et al., 2021; Huynh et al., 2011). Conceptualizing how one's identity markers interact with each other and are perceived by others in society impacts one's identity development. Religion and religious engagement are also a part of helping to establish a sense of bicultural identity integration through providing social engagement and community connection that services as an alternative to some of the negative effects that may come from schools or other community-based settings (King & Furrow, 2004; Schnitker et al., 2019). The sense of support, as well as social, cultural, and emotional development, from religious congregations helps with bicultural identity development, as religious congregations are a place where one's identity can be affirmed, discussed, and celebrated. This layer of continued support is important, especially as we consider bicultural identity development in places where youth are a part of the minority populations.

The cultural identities of AA youth are also formed by perceptions from wider social contexts (Allen et al., 2013; Mistry et al., 2016). For example, a "model minority image" is a typical social perception that connotes positive intrinsic talents and characteristics of AAs. The image is often related to AA youth's academic performances, where youth are viewed as studious and diligent (An, 2018; Shih et al., 2019; Tran & Birman, 2010). These race-related biases and social perceptions significantly affect developmental outcomes of AA youth by making them reflect on how they, as a member of a social group, are treated by others (Benner et al., 2018; Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). In many cases, this social image can be detrimental to the bicultural identity development of AA youth by triggering avoidance of their own identities as Asians and embracing the dominant racial ideology of whiteness as American (An, 2018; Gupta et al., 2011; Kibria, 2000). The expectation that Asians are studious, diligent, and successful creates a certain pressure on persons of Asian origin to meet this expectation. "Not satisfying" the image of model minority may cause them to reject parts of their identity to escape having to live up to the requirements of being a model minority. For example, in a study of Chinese and Korean

immigrants, Kibria (2000) identified that these young adults describe themselves as “Americans” while ignoring their Asian cultural values because of the pressures to “be ethnic.” These patterns were particularly salient for 1.5 generation AA youth (Shih et al., 2019). As such, this image can negatively contribute to AA youth’s sense of identification with heritage cultures, as well as feelings of in-betweenness that are crucial components of bicultural identity.

## Methods

Using a qualitative approach with SEM as a framework, this study aims to better understand the compounded effects of interactions as well as within-group variability in the bicultural identity experiences of 1.5 generation Korean immigrants

## Participants

Twelve Korean adults, who immigrated from South Korea with various demographic characteristics, were invited to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria to be interviewed were the following: (1) Korean adults born in South Korea and; (2) immigrated to the U.S. between the ages of three and 13 with their parents. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 58 years and were recruited from White-dominant areas (e.g., Colorado, Indiana). Although one participant has immigrated to California, which is one of the most popular states for Asian immigration, this participant later moved to Michigan and spent most of his time there. Given the continued growth and experiences from adolescence through adulthood, the age range offered a rich assessment of identity development and the way their upbringing affected their identities (Seiffge-Krenke & Haid, 2012; Syed & Azmitia, 2008).

Participants were recruited from a mid-size city in the Rocky Mountain West between December 2018 and March 2019 by distributing information about the study through Korean community organizations (e.g., Korean Christian churches), media, and networks, as well as by snowballing. Inquiries who contacted the first author by email or telephone were screened for eligibility and were sent further information about the study and a consent form prior to arranging their interview.

**Table 1**  
*Social Characteristics of Participants*

| Participants | Age | Age of immigration | Immigration location | Current living location |
|--------------|-----|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1            | 24  | 11                 | Indiana              | Colorado                |
| 2            | 29  | 5                  | Indiana              | Indiana                 |
| 3            | 20  | 11                 | Indiana              | Pennsylvania            |
| 4            | 20  | 8                  | Indiana              | Pennsylvania            |
| 5            | 25  | 12                 | Indiana              | Indiana                 |
| 6            | 29  | 12                 | Pennsylvania         | Colorado                |
| 7            | 22  | 11                 | Kentucky             | Colorado                |
| 8            | 29  | 11                 | Colorado             | Colorado                |
| 9            | 35  | 10                 | California           | Colorado                |
| 10           | 50  | 11                 | Iowa                 | Colorado                |
| 11           | 58  | 12                 | Pennsylvania         | New Jersey              |
| 12           | 46  | 5                  | Michigan             | California              |



## Procedure

The first researcher recruited two participants from social media and conducted 40 to 60-minute individual pilot interviews, which were not used within the final study. Given the preliminary results, the primary researcher of this study refined research questions and recruited 15 participants who met the research criteria (Creswell & Clark, 2011). All participants were screened for inclusion criteria and 12 out of 15 were selected as a final sample.

There are several assertions about the adequate sample size required for a qualitative study in a range of a minimum size of 12 to 50 (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Fugard & Potts, 2015). While the grounded theory sample size guidelines suggest 20-30 interviews to be sufficient, it has previously been recommended that qualitative studies require a minimum sample size of at least 12 to reach data saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Fugard & Potts, 2015). Therefore, a sample of 12 was deemed sufficient for the qualitative analysis and scale of the study. In further assessment, this study considered additional aspects when finalizing the number of participants: 1) nature and sensitivity of the studied phenomena and 2) geographical constraints with this demographic (Creswell, 2014; Sobal, 2001). First, we repeated interviews with each participant since the research focused on sensitive topics that elicits emotional states, perceived beliefs and inner values of participants (Sobal, 2001). To better understand nuances of bicultural identity development and to gain in-depth lived experiences from participants, this study focused on more in-depth interviews with a smaller cohort. Second, regarding the demographics of the regions where participants migrated, there was a lack of availability of sample size for this study. According to the 2010 U.S. census, nearly three-fourths of all Asians live in nine states (Hoeffel et al., 2012). The researchers were interested in assessing the bicultural identity development of 1.5 generation Korean immigrants, who migrated to the cities and states that were not known for their large Asian immigrant population. The 12 participants lived in the White-dominant states (e.g., Colorado, Indiana, and Pennsylvania) where only about 0.3% of the entire Asian immigrants are reported to reside (Kim, 2013; O'Connor et al., 2019).

Prior to conducting interviews, the first author ensured that interview questions aligned with the research questions by carefully wording and organizing questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Creswell, 2014). In each interview, the participant described the retrospective memories of childhood experiences around the time of immigration, current experiences about cultural identifications as adults, as well as relationships with parents, peers, and community members. These interview questions were continuously adjusted to equally elicit information relevant to research questions. Interviewing continued until researchers recognized the theoretical saturation, the phase of analysis in which the researcher has continued sampling and analyzing data until no new data appear and all concepts of the theory developed (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018; Castillo-Montoya, 2016). After each interview, the lead researcher coded transcripts line-by-line and compared them to previous transcripts. After completing the data analysis, the researcher followed up with participants who could provide thoughtful data about their bicultural identity. Seven out of 12 participants agreed to a 30 to 40-minute follow-up interview and reviewed reports to authenticate their information.

Each interview was conducted in the participant's preferred language, either Korean ( $n = 8$ ) or English ( $n = 4$ ). The interviews that were originally conducted in Korean were later translated into English by the first author who is a native Korean speaker. Ensuring translation reliability, the transcripts underwent backward translation by a qualified bilingual professional not directly involved with the initial translation or data collection and analysis. Additionally, member checks were conducted in multiple stages, such as reviewing transcriptions, quotes, and selected themes,

within the seven follow-up interviews (Creswell, 2014). These member checks established data validity by verifying meanings and themes with the participants.

## **Research Team**

The first author, a Korean female doctoral student in a social work program, was responsible for recruiting, scheduling, interviewing participants, transcribing, analyzing, and finalizing the major themes and storyline. She has prior experience working with immigrant youth and families as well as experience conducting qualitative research. The second author identifies as a Black woman with an educational background in Social Work and divinity. Her expertise focuses on mixed methods research within religious congregations that serve as mediating structures for youth's social and economic outcomes. She was responsible for analyzing the data, informing category development, and conducting data analysis.

## **Ethical Consideration**

Maintaining confidentiality and cultural sensitivity were critical ethical issues. Before the interview, each participant was informed that their participation was voluntary and their information would be de-identified during the transcription process. With their permission, interviews were then recorded. All audio recordings were transcribed as raw data for data analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board at the university affiliated with the authors.

## **Analysis Plan**

To offer an inclusive model to understand the experiences of bicultural identity among 1.5 immigrants, we utilized grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory can be used when there is little empirical research on the topic and the researchers aim to generate a new theory based on participants' experiences and views (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Foley & Timonen, 2015). A grounded theory methodology assumes that people's actions are determined by their interpretations of situations and social interactions while positioning people as actors and self-directors (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Kim & Hocking, 2017). This is congruent with the study's purpose to understand how bicultural identity develops through interactions within multiple contexts.

To better explore the bicultural identity development among 1.5 generation Korean immigrants, we combined grounded theory methodologies by Strauss and Corbin (1990) with Charmaz (2006). Our approach was influenced by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) mode of grounded theory data analysis and Charmaz's (2006) constructivist approach to interviewing that emphasizes rich data collection through sensitized listening. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) approach underpin that an individual's knowledge and experience are shaped by cultural values and norms through on-going interactions. Although this method enables researchers to comprehend various conditions and construct sufficiently analytical theories, it lacks researchers' sensitivity to the participant's voice (Mills et al., 2006). The limitations can be compensated by using Charmaz's (2006) approach, which emphasizes the interaction between researchers and participants as well as the researchers' role in listening to participants' unique experiences (Lauridsen & Higginbottom, 2014).

Using grounded theory methods, data were coded in open, axial, and selective order. First, in the open coding phase, any relevant codes and categories were deduced from the transcribed



data on the Atlas.ti. Software (Table 2). Based on Charmaz's (2006) approach, the researchers made descriptive and interactive interpretations using gerund and in vivo codes. Second, in the axial coding phase, categories were deduced from open coding and connected based on the components of the paradigm that relate causal condition, context, intervening conditions, interactive strategies, and consequences (Blair, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). The researchers used memos as a guide to make the conceptual connections between categories and create schematic diagrams. Lastly, in a selective coding process, different categories were integrated into one theoretical model (Bluff, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researchers used a conditional matrix to trace the impact of conditions at different levels inductively and deepen the understanding of the phenomenon (Singh & Estefan, 2018).

## Results

In this section, we discuss three phases of findings: 1) open coding categories; 2) axial application of the paradigm of causal, contextual, interactive, interaction, consequences, and the resulting core category; and 3) selective coding application of the conditional matrix.

### Open Coding: Categories, Sub-categories, and Concepts

Open coding in grounded theory is the first step of analytic process concerned with identifying, categorizing, and describing phenomenon found in transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this phase, the interview transcripts were examined line by line to develop initial codes, followed by comparisons of differences and similarities. The researcher deduced 110 concepts from the transcripts and clustered them into 33 sub-categories around a related theme. 15 categories emerged from sub-categories (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
*Concepts and Categorization*

|                   | Category                           | Sub-Category  | Concept  |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Causal conditions | Difficulty fitting in              | Feeling fearful<br>Unfamiliar with new language and culture | Feeling scared of prejudice towards Asians<br>Anxious and scared<br>Feeling nobody liked him/her<br>Resentment toward parents for forcing him/her to the U.S.  |
|                   |                                    |   | Uncomfortable with American culture in media<br>Felt too difficult to get used to the U.S. culture<br>Struggle with learning English<br>Felt frustrated with the language barrier  |
| Causal conditions | Feeling like a stranger            | No one to ask for help<br>Feeling like a stranger           | Parents were too busy with their own work<br>Parents who are unfamiliar with American culture to ask for advice<br>Lack of cares from schoolteachers<br>Feeling like an outsider<br>Eager to be with American peers but difficult<br>Feeling loneliness<br>Miss the time back in Korea |
|                   |                                    |   |  |
| Phenomeno         | Frustration with the self-identity | Feeling pressures of being 1.5 generation                   | Feeling resentment to parents for bringing oneself to the U.S.<br>Feel burden to be a translator for parents   |
|                   |                                    | Struggling with answering who I am                          | Being ignorant of oneself<br>Being not perfect Korean when visiting Korea<br>Always questioning to self about who I am<br>Feel different from Korean Americans   |

|                        |  |  |   |
|------------------------|--|--|---|
| Context                |  | Denial of ethnicity                          | No interests in/negative images of Korean culture<br>Try not to get along with Korean peers   |
|                        |  | Closing one's mind                           | Refuse to talk to parents<br>Feeling lost and miserable<br>Self-isolation   |
|                        |  | Negative self-image                          | A lack of confidence and motivation<br>Blaming oneself for language barriers  |
|                        |  | Deviant behaviors                            | Skipping school<br>Smoking<br>Refused to go to church with family   |
|                        | Society's negative perspectives on own ethnicity                   | Stereotypes about 1.5 generation experienced | People's stereotypes that all 1.5 generations are not good at speaking Korean<br>People at the church feel pity for just being a 1.5 generation immigrant   |
|                        |  | Discrimination                               | Discriminated by White peers about sports<br>Physically and emotionally bullied by peers  |
|                        |  | Prejudice towards Asian                      | Exposed to the notion of model minority<br>Struggle with the Asian stereotypes<br>Difficulty dating as an Asian male  |
|                        | Cultural diversity in the region where they grew up                | Multicultural society                        | Many African American, Hispanic, and Chinese students<br>Majority of children in their age were second-generation   |
|                        |  | White dominant society                       | Grew up in the White dominant society<br>Viewed as Asian, not Korean<br>The only 1.5-Korean male child in church<br>Few Asian students at school  |
|                        | An inter-generational difference in culture and growth backgrounds | Korean style parenting                       | Being forced to be obedient to parents<br>Pressured to follow hierarchical culture<br>Forced by parents to befriend only White peers<br>Forced to be fluent in Korean<br>Parents' efforts to embrace American-style parenting   |
|                        |  | Intergenerational cultural dissonance        | Parents' lack of experience in American culture<br>Cultural gap between self and parents<br>Parents were raised in competitive and homogeneous Korean society   |
| Intervening conditions | Support from people in the White community                         | Support from the White community             | Immersed in American culture with the help from White peers<br>Support from White friends to overcome a fear of stereotypes toward Asian<br>Still in good friendship with White peers<br>Support from school American counselors and teachers to adjust to a new culture  |
|                        | Support from the people in the Korean community                    | Support from Korean church communities       | Join the religious camp in the Korean church<br>Felt distance from international or Korean students<br>Went to the college with church friend<br>Learning Korean culture from Korean church   |
|                        |  | Support from 1.5 generation                  | Feel strongly belonged to 1.5 generation community<br>Sharing common experiences of struggles with 1.5 generation immigrants  |
|                        |  | Support from family                          | Parents' lack of empathy for those who struggle with cultural discrimination<br>Parents' lack of interests for facing cultural issues<br>Parents' trust and belief in self based on American-oriented parenting<br>Parents' encouragement for being a Korean<br>Using Korean as a communication tool at home<br>Parents' encouragement to visit Korea at least once in a year |
|                        | Positive thinking  | Resilience                                   | Accepting self and focusing on what to do next<br>Strong determination<br>Relying on Christianity (religion)  |
|                        |  | Bracing self                                 | Ignored how others perceive me<br>Having a neutral attitude toward model minority   |

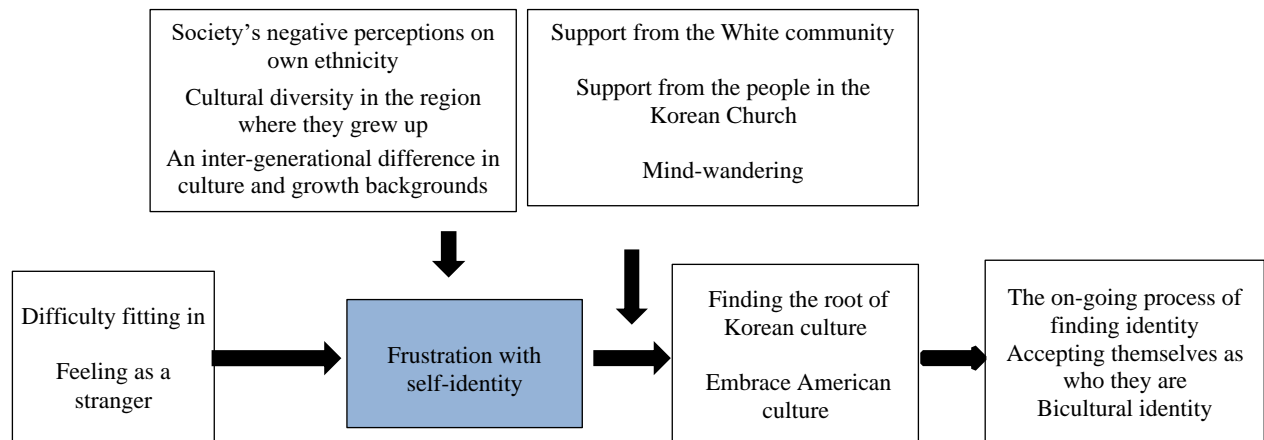
|              |  |  |  |
|--------------|--|--|--|
|              |  |  | Trying not to reveal concerns/struggles to anyone  |
| Interaction  | Finding the root of Korean culture       | Voluntarily engage in Korean church activities   | Voluntarily went to Korean church with parents<br>Embracing Korean culture at Korean church<br>Teaching the Korean language to second-generation children  |
|              |  | Closer to Koreans                                | Married Korean partner<br>Prefer to date with Koreans  |
|              |  | Learning Korean culture                          | Frequently contact relatives living in Korea<br>Visiting historical tourism places in Korea<br>Eager to improve the Korean language<br>Enjoy teaching Korean culture to White peers<br>Asking relatives about family history and backgrounds |
|              |  | Trying to understand parents' situations         | Feel appreciated parents' change from Korean style to American style parenting<br>Open to share the difference between Korean and American culture with parents<br>A stance against discriminatory or prejudice of parents                   |
|              | Embracing American culture               | Efforts to be involved in the American community | Actively participate in school activities<br>A desire to improve English skills<br>Respect White peers' good behaviors and try to learn from them<br>Hang out more with White peers  |
| Consequences | The on-going process of finding identity | Ambivalent feeling                               | Though not going back to Korea, still want to learn Korean culture<br>Living in the U.S., but don't want to work in an American company  |
|              |  | Imbalanced attachment to culture                 | More inclined to American culture than Korean culture or vice versa<br>A strong sense of belonging in the Korean community<br>No sense of belonging to US culture  |
|              |  | Imperfect being in a borderline                  | "Neither this nor that"<br>Perfect in neither of language<br>Still struggling with understanding who I am<br>Re-contemplating about own identity in middle age   |
|              | Accepting themselves as who they are     | Positive self-image                              | Proud of being Korean<br>Lucky to be 1.5 generation<br>Have more benefits compared to international students or second-generation  |
|              |  | Feeling no stress about choosing one culture     | Don't have to belong to either Korean or American culture<br>Do not feel differences from Korean<br>Identity is not an issue anymore   |
|              | Bicultural identity                      | Bridging two cultures and generations            | Motivated to deliver Korean heritage to 2nd-generation immigrant children<br>Spokesperson for parents  |
|              |  | Accepting positive features from two cultures    | Embracing the positive points of two cultures<br>Bridging role between American and Korean culture   |

### Axial Coding: A Paradigm Model on the Process of Bicultural Identity

Followed by open coding, axial coding is the process of relating codes to each other and fitting them into a basic frame of generic relationships through a combination of inductive and deductive thinking (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Detected categories and their relationships were restructured according to the axial coding analysis framework and a visualized paradigm model is included in Figure 1.

## Figure 1

### *A Paradigm Model on the Identity Development in 1.5 Generation Korean Immigrants*



## *Causal Conditions*

Causal conditions include participants' experiences, knowledge, and beliefs informed by their contexts that directly influence the occurrence of a main phenomenon (Kang et al., 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As a first step of the coding paradigm, two causal conditions emerged: "Difficulty fitting in" and "Feeling as a stranger." As children, participants found it difficult to adjust to the unfamiliar cultural environment because of language barriers. Participant #5 stated:

*I was just having a hard time getting used to a new environment because everything I learned was new and all the TV shows I watched were in English. I could not understand what they were talking about. At that time, cultural matters were fine. Language was the biggest issue that I really felt struggling and challenging. (Participant #5)*

In addition to language barriers, differences between their heritage culture and mainstream culture led participants to describe their early immigration childhood filled with feelings of loneliness and hurtful memories:

*In Korea, I had a lot of differences, since I always spent time at school doing various activities with my friends. But then, after coming to the US, I did not have many friends to hang out. I felt lonely both at school and at home because my life has completely changed. (Participant #3)*

As described above, as participants migrated to the U.S., they struggled with the new cultural adaptation and lack of language proficiency. These concerns were compounded by growing up in communities that did not reflect their cultural identities.

## ***Phenomenon***

A phenomenon is a central idea or event produced by a combination of such causal conditions (Min et al., 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The main phenomenon experienced by 1.5 generation Korean immigrants was “Uncertainty about self-identity.” Participants felt lost and over time purposely isolated themselves. For example, participant #6 noted, “There were a lot of confusions in my mind. I felt lonely but I didn’t want to talk to anyone.” Participant #2 reflected:

*And even when I traveled back to Korea, I realized I am not considered Korean just like people living there because of different living patterns and using different words. I did not really know exactly where I belong at that time.*

This uncertainty of identity, in many circumstances, resulted in negative self-concepts among most participants when they were in developmental stages. Such uncertainty of self-identity was associated with their negative self-images, such as less life satisfaction and engagement in school activities, as well as lack of confidence and motivation:

*Feeling that not belonging anywhere, I was not sure if I could survive well in this new country for the rest of my life. I didn’t really like being associated with Americans, so I stopped going to school. I didn’t see there is any point in learning English or American culture. (Participant #6)*

## ***Contextual Conditions***

The contextual conditions refer to the circumstances to which people respond through actions and interactions to handle or overcome the phenomenon (Min et al., 2018; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). These conditions can be characterized by dimensions including time, duration, and space. In the process of bicultural identity development, contextual conditions were categorized as “Society’s negative perspectives and stereotypes about one’s own ethnicity,” “Cultural diversity in the region where they grew up,” and “Intergenerational difference of culture and growth backgrounds.” Participants struggled with stereotypes about Asian ethnicity held by White people and a lack of co-ethnic community members in their neighborhood. They reported that they are discouraged by instances of racism from their peers and subsequent pressures toward assimilation. Participants also described how their appearance as Asian influenced people’s perceptions of themselves.

*I won the presidential athletic awards every year. And then, I remember when I received the awards on physical examinations, a lot of people at school thought I cheated or, I lied about my results. From their perspectives, all I do is study all day. (Participant #2)*

*Because I was living in the Southern part of Indiana, we did not have many Asian people, even at the church. There were some Koreans, but all of them only spoke in English since they were born in the U.S. (Participant #4)*



Participants addressed a dissonance of acculturation level and conflicts between themselves and their parents. They spoke of parental pressures to befriend only White peers and to become perfect Koreans. More specifically, participants were asked by their parents to maintain heritage culture and master their native language, while hanging out with American peers to learn English and assimilate to American culture. Some addressed parents' harsh and strict parenting styles that lacked emotional support and empathy:

*I remember my dad got mad at me for not being able to act like an obedient child and not perfect at Korean. And he always thought Korean culture is always better than American culture and wanted me to keep Korean culture. And he did not sympathize with me or give me compliments. I don't think I had much emotional support from him when I was young, like, "Wow, great job." (Participant #2)*

Participants faced conflicts of two cultural values between the contexts of family and mainstream social contexts including schools as they just migrated to the U.S. These conditions intersect dimensionally and create a set of circumstances that determine strategies to deal with interaction and intervening conditions.

### ***Intervening Conditions***

Intervening conditions refer to any general conditions that participants can buffer or intervene in the intensity of a central phenomenon in their daily lives (Min et al., 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These conditions can include any interpersonal resources or general conditions that cause participants to take proactive actions (Min et al., 2018). For this study, "Support from the people in the White community," "Support from the people in the Korean community," "Parents' engaging of cultural issues," and "action-oriented affective goals" were categorized as intervening conditions that determine participants' interaction strategies. As one of the positive intervening conditions, Participant #11 shared the experiences of receiving support from her American peer:

*A friend of mine who belonged to White community was supportive of me. Although I was not good at English, she did not show her dissatisfaction outside and let me learn English language and culture. And I remember my school counselor introduced a lot about American culture and took me to various service programs like, ESL (English as a Second Language) programs and extracurricular activities for international students. I joined all of them and made new friends in there too. (Participant #11)*

Participant #5 and #8 shared that attending Korean Christian churches enhanced their emotional stability by improving their relationships with their parents. Both participants described their parents' parenting styles changed from typical Korean to American style as their parents went to the Christian church and gathered information on living in the U.S. from other Korean immigrants. This interaction between their parents and members of the church in a larger context influenced parenting styles, thereby improving parent-child relationship. The way in which parents respond to their children's need for autonomy and support encouraged participants to be themselves, to be self-assured and confident about their goals. Such supportive parenting also

motivated participants to explore the cultural values that they share with their parents in common, thereby promoting positive bicultural identity development.

*I think my parents changed when they started going to church. Most of the parents in our church were living in the U.S. for a long time, like ten years or even 20 years. I think my mom got much advice from them. It's kind of something that led my parents to become more into the American style of parenting, which made me feel being supported and feel more comfortable.*  
(Participant #5)

While most participants described their positive experiences of receiving support from significant people, some still reported a lack of support from their parents and the people from their Korean community. For example, participant #2 described their parents' lack of understanding of social exclusion or cultural tolerance, which brought on feelings of anger, isolation, and sadness:

*And I know my mom is sometimes too narrow-minded... I remember the time I was talking to mom about Plessy vs. Ferguson. I told her that there is always racial discrimination against African Americans in the U.S, but Umma ("mother" in Korean) was like, "They might have done something wrong." (Participant #2)*

In addition, some participants sensed a distance growing as they have thought of themselves as different from Korean international students who came to the U.S. in late adolescence. Participant #4 mentioned:

*I have been thinking of myself as Korean, but whenever I talked to some Korean international students in my church, I felt somewhat a distance from them... I mean, I am not like them, you know, being perfect at Korean language or knowing Korean culture like them even if we are sharing the same culture. At first, I tried to hang out with them, but then later I found it quite challenging to follow what they talk about and that distracted me a lot. (Participant #4)*

While participants went through positive and negative intervening conditions based on interpersonal interactions, they also had inner conditions of a strong determination and acceptance of themselves, which worked as a buffering component to the central phenomenon of dealing with uncertainty with bicultural identity. Participant #8 noted, "Those kinds of stuff (discrimination experiences) were frustrating, but you know, there is nothing we can change for now... So, I kept telling myself not to be mindful of them and just move forward."

Likewise, most participants reported having close friendships with people from their own ethnic groups in Korean Christian churches and those from other ethnic groups in schools. Receiving support from interpersonal resources in multiple contexts and keeping a strong determination became a great source of resilience and a positive mindset that led to interaction strategies.

## ***Interaction Strategies***

Interaction strategies usually include purposeful and intentional actions that are taken in response to the core phenomenon (Sun et al., 2009). Compared to intervening conditions, interactive conditions are more focused on the self of the acting person (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). In this study, “Finding the root of Korean culture” and “Embracing American culture” were categorized within interaction strategies. Some participants reported that they voluntarily exposed themselves to the Korean culture, hoping to learn more about the origin of their culture by starting to go to the Korean Christian church by themselves and hanging out with Korean people. Participant #10 reflected: “I started to go to the church on my own, and I think it was a really great experience for me to know what Korean culture means. I wish I could speak and write Korean.”

On the other hand, Participant #6 shared experiences of being exposed to American culture and the American White community to overcome negative feelings rooted in discriminatory experiences. This participant expressed a desire to improve English language skills to better communicate with White peers and embrace positive parts of American culture by noting: “I studied English and tried to hang out with White friends. Then I came to have a more individualistic character, which I think is closer to American culture than Korean culture” (Participant #6).

These few examples highlight that many of the 1.5 generation participants strived to understand their identities by actively engaging in cultural activities. The level of engagement in Asian or American culture is foundational to bicultural identity development among the participants.

## ***Consequences***

Consequences are the outcomes driven by interaction strategies (Kim, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Participants noted their desire to maintain “The ongoing process of finding identity,” “Accepting themselves as who they are,” and “Developing bicultural identity.” Because participants grow up with two cultures and languages, they crafted a bicultural identity by fusing positive aspects of both cultures. A few of them reported that they are still figuring out to which culture they belong, giving reasons for not satisfying with their Korean language proficiency and never having been visited Korea. Although these participants were ambiguous about their bicultural identity, they perceived themselves as different from others, as more interesting and unique individuals. For example, participant #3 illustrated that confusion about being 1.5 generation immigrant; however, the participant felt delighted about learning further about his culture of origin by building trustful relationships with people within the Korean community:

*Uh, that's very vague about what my identity is... I think I am still in 'neither one thing nor the other.' I always think and ask myself, who am I, and why? Sometimes I feel like I am in mixed culture but still have no idea. But anyway, I am Korean, and I like Korean culture, Korean parents, and our Korean church... As long as I like them and feel like I want to keep them with me, ...there is nothing to say this is wrong or correct.*  
(Participant #3)

Similarly, one participant reflected on a feeling of ambiguity familiar to many 1.5-generation immigrants, navigating two cultural worlds. However, this participant felt lucky to be

a member of 1.5 generation immigrants due to their own capacity to connect Asian heritage and U.S. mainstream culture.

*I think 1.5 generation immigrants, including me, are lucky. Because we have opportunities to be comfortable in both languages and cultures compared to the second-generation, although it may not be exactly balanced. And I think going to the church gave me some ideas about my identity and making connections with other generations. (Participant #7)*

Most participants in this study discussed several advantages of being 1.5-generation immigrants: being bilingual, being open-minded, and having clearer ideas about their cultural identities. They also addressed that being bicultural is meaningful since it connects the first- and second-generation immigrants as cultural brokers. With their own resourcefulness and strategies, they found themselves to be able to overcome the challenges of being “in-between two cultures.”

### **Five Stages of Bicultural Identity Development**

After classifying the experiences of the development of bicultural identity for 1.5 generation Korean immigrants into stages that capture changes in time and movement, five stages were conceptualized: 1) Anxiety and fear from cultural difference; 2) Confusion; 3) Exploration; 4) Acceptance; and 5) Stability.

#### ***Anxiety and Fear Stage***

The stage of feeling anxiety and fear occurs as 1.5 generation immigrants faced cultural differences at the time of immigration. Their initial attempts to adapt to a new culture often led to failure mainly because of language barriers and lack of support. Participants expressed that their lack of English proficiency was the greatest challenge that triggered feelings of isolation, fear, and homesickness. This acculturative stress and negative feelings experienced by 1.5 generation immigrants worked as casual conditions that led to their bicultural identity confusion.

#### ***Confusion Stage***

Most participants at this stage struggled to understand which culture they belonged to and were confused with their self-identity. The participants suffered low self-esteem from grappling with confusing identity and denying their ethnicity as Koreans. Depending on interpersonal relationships and daily experiences, the height of their bicultural identity confusion differed. More specifically, the more parent-child acculturation gaps and experiences of racial discrimination at school they had, the earlier the bicultural identity confusion emerged. Participants at this stage rebelled against their parents by not following family traditions, such as refusing to go to the Korean Christian church and learn Korean culture and becoming involved in delinquent behavior.

#### ***Exploration Stage***

This is the stage where participants confronted their struggles and chose to take possible steps rather than isolating themselves. At this stage, participants used strategies from interactive conditions including finding the root of Korean culture, which included engaging in activities

related to their heritage culture, hanging out with Korean peers, and actively communicating with their parents. As they commuted to the Korean Christian church on their own, they could not just learn Korean culture and language, but also interact with second-generation immigrants and their White peers by teaching what they have learned. When the participants became adults, many visited their country of origin and asked their relatives about family backgrounds. Some of them explored American culture and became involved in American communities after deciding to stay in the U.S. with their families or by themselves.

### ***Acceptance Stage***

Participants at this stage no longer felt regretful or depressed due to their negative experiences of racism and identity confusion. With the ambiguous feelings of pity and pride toward their parents who struggled with the U.S. mainstream culture and language barriers, participants strived to be empathetic and endeavored to overcome their own distress and accept their reality. Embracing self, letting go of racism, and the model minority image, and accepting their own uniqueness can be examples of this stage. During this stage, some participants also chose to be more independent and deal with problems by themselves.

### ***Stability Stage***

At this stage, participants experienced self-reflection and felt comfortable with their identity status. All participants came to realize that no matter which community they are involved in or who they are, they perceived themselves as valuable beings in society. Despite a certain degree of difference in attachment to culture, all participants felt a strong connection to their culture of origin. They perceived knowing and being fluent in both cultures as the most significant merits for their ethnicity. Also, they felt lucky to be “in-betweens” and “in the middle” of two cultures since they can have the benefit of understanding the dynamics of cultural norms and practices. Although participants went through a period of confusion, hardship, and negative self-perceptions, they overcame these challenges and reached the stage of stability through support from others.

### **Selective Coding: Core Category and Conditional Matrix**

Selective coding is the process of relating the categories to be the core category to develop a storyline and theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At this phase, the process of the bicultural identity was described, tracking how the outcome varies according to the various conditions of interactions at the levels of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community levels (Figure 2).

At the intrapersonal level, participants’ feelings of loneliness and perceiving themselves as strangers were causal and coping and resilience were intervening factors for developing a stable identity. These results imply that 1.5 generation immigrants’ self-perceptions and attitudes play important roles in identity formation. Particularly, those who had strong resilience and determination strived to find their roots of heritage culture on their own and accept their positionalities earlier than others.

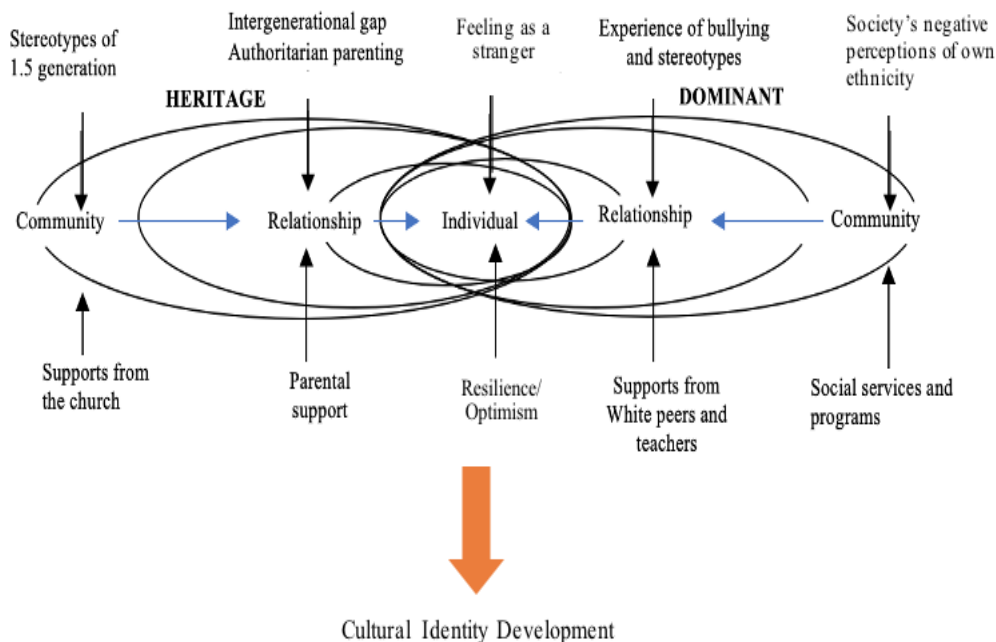
At the interpersonal level, the support from parents and peers, particularly parents’ parenting styles and cultural tolerant attitudes, were crucial intervening factors for the bicultural identity formation of 1.5 generation immigrants. Participants struggled with developing cult bicultural identities as they were pushed to interact with peers or master a language that was limited to a specific culture. On the contrary, if their parents adopted aspects of the American parenting



style with unprejudiced attitudes towards other ethnic groups, participants could feel more connected to parents and build confidence and self-esteem. Although not frequently mentioned, support from White peers was found as a positive, and a lack of care from White teachers at school was found as a negative relationship-level factor. These specific themes can be further explored in future studies focused on school settings and their relevance to bicultural identity development.

**Figure 2**

*The Conditional Matrix of 1.5 Generation Korean Immigrants' Cultural Identity Development*



At the community level, lower levels of cultural tolerance in the society and higher levels of stereotypical perceptions of ethnicity brought more intense levels of identity confusion among the participants. More specifically, stereotypes of both the 1.5 generation in their own communities as well as those about Asians from U.S. mainstream culture members triggered the participants to deny their ethnicity and alienate themselves from their communities. Despite these negative circumstances in the society, participants could develop a stable bicultural identity with support from communities, such as learning Korean culture, religious beliefs, and joining activities from the Korean church.

## Discussion

Current literature addresses the bicultural identity development process as multidimensional. Guided by this conceptualization, we aimed to improve our understanding of the nature of the 1.5 generation Korean immigrants' bicultural identity development within the contexts of family, school, religious communities. The key findings of this study significantly expand previous scholarship by providing evidence of process and specific contextual conditions that are related to bicultural identity development for 1.5 generation Korean immigrants.

A lack of English language proficiency and racial discrimination were the main hardships for 1.5 generation Korean immigrants who came to the U.S. in their early childhood. Participants in this study experienced difficulties with adjusting to a new cultural and school environment at the early stage of settlement (Ahn, 2020; Kim & Agee, 2018; Robles-Llana, 2018; Son, 2013). As they got older and adapted to the U.S. culture, they had additional struggles that resonated with second-generation immigrants, such as lacking knowledge of Korean culture and being uncomfortable with their culture of origin. Also, participants facing the model minority stereotype saw themselves as a “good immigrant” at the early stage of acculturation; however, with deeper reflection, they recognized its implicit meaning and feel overwhelmed and uncomfortable. Moreover, living in White dominant regions was found to be a challenging condition for participants in the early stage of settlement due to a lack of networks with co-ethnic members.

While previous studies mainly focused on either first- or second-generation immigrants, this study supports the evidence that 1.5 generation immigrants experience different levels of confusion and ambiguity in the process of bicultural identity development. For example, first and second-generation immigrants came of age in one place and may have shaped their cultural identity around their culture of origin and U.S. culture, respectively. On the other hand, coming of age between their Korea and the U.S., 1.5 generation immigrants can have dynamic experiences with developing bicultural identity (Ahn, 2020), namely based on the split locations and the vulnerability of the time of their immigration (Kebede, 2010). Indeed, most participants in this study were uncertain about their self-concepts as they constantly changed their attitudes toward two cultures. For example, the intergenerational acculturation gaps led 1.5 generation immigrants to define themselves as Korean Americans based on their appearance, but not as Koreans, which express more of the individuality of their culture. These challenges evoked a sense of “not fitting in” to either the American society or the “home” Asian country, thereby leading to struggles to balance between Asian and American culture. These findings were consistent with a few studies on 1.5 generation AAs’ difficulty in developing bicultural identity (Lee, 2013; Robles-Llana, 2018; Son, 2013).

While 1.5 generation individuals articulated these challenges, they attained their own strategies and shaped their own cultural identities through continuous reciprocal interactions with people. Participants in this study addressed that their parents, peers, and Korean Christian community members both directly and indirectly influenced their personalities and helped them develop bicultural identity. For example, attending Korean church and interacting with church members motivated Korean parents to adopt American authoritative parenting styles, which gave their child a free will to express or choose what they prioritize and engage with their Korean peers. Embracing new ideals presented at the Korean churches also enabled participants to understand their parents’ struggles as immigrants. This finding aligns with previous studies’ arguments that parents embrace American-style parenting because of adopting American cultural norms, which impacts their children’s identity negotiation (Kim & Agee, 2018; Lu et al., 2020; Roh & Chang, 2020).

At the community level, all participants, including those who were not religiously affiliated, reported that Korean Christian church has been a central part of their lives that influenced their bicultural identity development. Participants felt comfortable and relieved to be a church member since they could share the same cultural elements of their country of origin. Particularly for newly immigrated Korean immigrant families with limited access to co-ethnic communities, Korean church can be a significant place to share useful information for survive and build networks. Specifically, Korean parents can incorporate their Korean parenting styles with American ones based on the needs of their children and their own comfort level. More specifically, going to

Korean Christian churches encouraged Korean parents to adopt American authoritative parenting styles, which gave their child a freedom to express or choose what they prioritize and engage with their Korean peers. This finding aligns with previous studies' arguments that Asian parents' embrace of American-style parenting can positively influence their children's bicultural identity negotiation (Kim & Agee, 2018; Roh & Chang, 2020). Moreover, Korean churches allow a sense of belonging, security, and support that encourage parents and their children to engage more expansively with each other by taking their minds off the pressures that may be brought on by having to adjust to a new culture. This communal and supportive forum can be one of the significant social environments that promote a truly bicultural identity development among children.

Given the differences of preserving cultural heritage by race/ethnicity, the role of Christian churches can be particularly significant for Korean immigrant families. While families with other ethnic minority backgrounds (e.g., Jewish and Latino/Hispanic) preserve their culture of origin at home, Korean immigrants in our study found it less likely to maintain their Korean heritage culture because of the Korean parenting style that focuses on child's academic performance and success (Bae-Hansard, 2015; Kim, 2014; Roh & Chang, 2020). While family members may encounter barriers to engaging in cultural practices, Korean Christian churches can perform these practices such as Korean language school programs and celebration of Korean traditional holidays. For Korean immigrant families, Korean Christian church can be "extended-family" where the same "Korean-ness" can be shared, understood, and become more pronounced. This can promote a strong sense of shared bicultural identity among 1.5 generation Korean immigrants.

More importantly, 1.5 generation immigrants' cultural identity does not exist in certain or fixed states, rather it is fluid. Most participants described their experiences beyond simply choosing one culture over the other. Although not exactly balancing between their Asian and American identity, 1.5 generation individuals possessed positive attitudes toward two cultures and self-pride that are key components of bicultural identity. Such fluidity in the perception of the self contrasts with traditional cultural assimilation models that address the notion of unchanging Asian values, cultural continuity, and the linear change in the 1.5 generation individuals' adaptation to their new culture (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013; Sirikantraporn, 2017; Walsh et al., 2015).

## Limitations

The results of this study should be interpreted in consideration of its limitations. There is a potential bias in the results since this study relied on a purposeful sampling method and the findings are also restricted to the sample of this study who responded to requests for participation. Also, this study is based on retrospective reporting from participants, which might have led to a subjective bias if participants did not recall their experiences completely. Regarding sample characteristics, the age of our sample in our study ranged from 20-58 (Table 1), but half of the participants were in their 20s, which may limit the variation of experiences of participants. Similarly, since the data were presented from interviews with a relatively small group of heterosexual and church-involved participants, the results may not generalize to all 1.5 generation Korean immigrants. Thus, future studies could explore how immigrants' lived experiences relate to gender identities and experiences (e.g., not involved in Korean churches) and the intersection between these and other social locations. Moreover, our findings for 1.5 generation Korean immigrants may not apply to those with personal background, living in predominantly White regions, or uninvolved or marginalized from the Korean Christian church. Future studies should

further explore backgrounds, locations, and personal characteristics of 1.5 generation Korean immigrants that can reveal potential variations.

## Implications

Despite these limitations, this study makes several contributions to research on bicultural identity and psychological outcomes for 1.5 generation Korean immigrants and provides implications in practice and policy. The following list identifies a few implications for understanding 1.5 generation Korean immigrants' bicultural identity development:

- This study underscored how 1.5 generation immigrants develop their identity, the roles of interactions within sociocultural contexts, and sources of coping and support for managing negative experiences and feelings using social-ecological perspective. Given that parents' understanding of cultural issues and culturally responsive attitudes are relevant to their children's positive bicultural identity, it is important to encourage parents to embrace an open-minded cultural perspective and develop parenting behavior based on both cultures rather than sticking to one or the other.
- By understanding the unique roles of Korean Christian churches in maintaining the Korean cultural tradition, social workers and behavioral health professionals can further explore how Korean Christian church can serve important cultural and social functions for immigrants and the Korean community.
- This study provides a new lens of viewing 1.5 generation immigrants' bicultural identity as socially constructed, fluid, and embedded in multiple contexts. Therefore, clinicians and practitioners must provide culturally appropriate resources for 1.5 generation immigrants to help them develop bicultural identity. For example, clinicians can facilitate counseling and psychoeducational support and bicultural training curriculums with a focus on the topics related to adaptation and acculturation issues. These interventive approaches are necessary for multiple settings for supporting not only 1.5 generation immigrants but also their families, school staff, peers, as well as community members. Doing so would create safer spaces for 1.5 generation immigrants as it recognizes their unique needs and maintains a distinction between first-, 1.5-, and second-generation immigrants.
- Lastly, our findings highlight the importance of bicultural identity development of multicultural individuals who immigrate or emigrate across the world. With globalization and a projected increase in international immigration around the globe, there need to be continuous efforts to support immigrants and bicultural individuals with their acculturation, identity development, and psychological adjustment. Our findings suggest in the process of managing bicultural environments and group loyalties and perceiving one's two cultural identities as integrated can be important antecedents of positive well-being of individuals and communities.

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## Notes on Contributors

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