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Yuna Park Date

Examining Indicators of Endogamous and Exogamous Practices

Among Koreans in a Multicultural Society

by

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# Examining Indicators of Endogamous and Exogamous Practices Among Koreans in a Multicultural Society

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
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Abstract

Examining Indicators of Endogamous and Exogamous Practices

Among Koreans in a Multicultural Society

By Yuna Park

This thesis examines two types of marriages Koreans in the United States follow: ethnic endogamy and ethnic/racial exogamy. Specifically, it addresses the factors that influence one's decision in choosing a marriage partner using surveys and semi-structured interviews. Some of the topics that this thesis engages include: female participants' tendencies to choose ethnic/racial exagomy, participants evaluating love and ethnic endogamy as mutually exclusive categories in choosing a marriage partner, and the clash between tradition (i.e. patriarchal family structure) and modern beliefs. In addition, the findings are used to explain issues of self-expression and ethnic identity in a multicultural society.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

Marriage exists in all societies. It is often defined as a legal union between two people to share commitments, benefits, and troubles. However, anthropologists have debated the universal scope of this definition because it is not universally applicable. As a result, many scholars have attempted to formulate a new definition, inclusive of all cultures and their varying marital traditions. Marriage is anthropologically described as a relationship between two or more people that recognizes the sexual access rights, partial or total property rights, and legitimacy of offspring. (Leach 183).

Types of marriages vary by cultural expectations and kinship formation within each society. Generally, anthropologists use the term "endogamy" to describe marriage between people of the same group and "exogamy" as a marriage between people from two different groups. It is generally assumed that members of the same group often hold similar values and standards. Therefore, individuals (albeit complete strangers) who belong to the same group are more likely to feel comfortable around each other. Similarly, research suggests that people are more likely to form acquaintances, marry, and reside near those who are racially and ethnically similar to themselves than those who are not (Bonam and Shih 87). Furthermore, it has been argued that ethnic and racial endogamy is of special interest and significance among minorities in the United States because endogamous marriage helps conserve ethnic identity, group boundaries, and racial pluralism in a multicultural society (Kikumura and Kitano 67; Rosenfeld 1).

Nonetheless, ethnic and racial exogamy is still widely practiced among minorities

in the United States. Past studies have identified enhanced social and political affiliations and assimilation into the new culture as the most dominant indicators of exogamous behavior (Hall 405; Qian and Lichter 291). A minority group's exogamous marriage patterns also tend to vary according to the historical and social situation each racial and ethnic group experiences (Jacobs and Labov 622; Jacobson and Heaton 129).

The categorization is not as simple as it may appear because of the inherent ambiguity in the terms endogamy and exogamy. People beyond the nuclear family are technically outsiders so all marriages are to some extent exogamous. This raises the question how people consider someone similar and different. For example, religion, class, and race, and ethnicity can be factors that distinguish groups as same and different. There are multiple indicators that can influence minorities' marital patterns, so the need to contextually define endogamy and exogamy is critical in each case.

My research utilizes interviews and surveys to identify variables that are strong indicators of the endogamous and exogamous marital practices of Koreans living in the United States, with Korean notions of "race" and "ethnicity" serving as the reference points in separating people into groups. Specifically, I will explore the causation of interracial and interethnic marriages among Koreans and compare those indicative characteristics to the marriages that occur within the Korean ethnic population. In doing so, I hope to discover the most dominant factors that affect preference and decision in marrying a Korean or a non-Korean.

During my ten-year residence in the United States, I have observed a great divide among many of the Koreans I have encountered, as it relates to their view of the type of marriage they wanted to follow: either traditional (endogamy) or interracial or interethnic

marriages. Over time, these observations have led me to contemplate the indicators and beliefs of these different individuals within the same ethnic group, my ethnic group. I had assumed that was due to differences in upbringing and background.

My curiosity grew when my cousin, Sohyun, got married in June of 2006. As a Korean-born native, she maintained the tradition by marrying another Korean-born individual. Three years later, I attended the wedding of Sohyun's younger sister, Jihyun, who is also a Korean-born native and comes from a nearly identical upbringing as Sohyun. To my astonishment, it turned out that Jihyun deviated from the usual Korean tradition and married exogamously to a second-generation Chinese-American. What influenced such a drastic difference between the marriage partner choices of two sisters? This question transformed my casual contemplation into a desire to systematically examine the factors that most significantly and measurably determine Korean marriage patterns in the United States.

*Initial Hypotheses*

Based on my personal observations of the two sisters, I hypothesize that individuals who are more exposed to Korean culture, facilitated by the Korean media, a large Korean population near their residential city, Korean friends and acquaintances, social activities, church and other religious organizations, and frequent trips to Korea – will be more likely to choose to engage in endogamous marriages. In addition, I hypothesize that immigrants of the second and later generation will be more likely to marry exogamously than a first-generation individual. This thesis will investigate these hypotheses using both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

*Defining Endogamy and Exogamy in Korean Cultural Context*

There are many different ways to mark someone as similar or different, making it crucial to identify these varying categories on a case-by-case basis. The definitions of endogamy and exogamy vary greatly among the Koreans residing in South Korea (Korean natives) and Koreans living in the United States (Koreans overseas). In 2005, East Asian Institute and *JoongAng Ilbo* (a well-respected newspaper in South Korea) surveyed Korean natives and asked their participants to list the important criteria to be considered a genuine Korean. It was noted that factors such as "maintaining Korean nationality, using Korean language, following Korean tradition and custom, born in Korea, and Korean bloodline" (Y. Lee 377) were considered important by over 80 percent of the participants. In another question, they were asked to identify a person as Korean or non-Korean based on demographics. The surveyors discovered that while North Koreans and first-generation immigrants met the standards of the natives, second and later generation immigrants, Korean adoptees, and naturalized foreigners were not commonly regarded as Koreans (378).

My personal interactions, observations, and experience among my participants led me to believe that Koreans living overseas tend to deviate from the natives. Although many retain the notion that Koreans should be able to speak Korean, have a family history that can be traced back to Korea, and understand Korean traditions and customs, Koreans living abroad generally do not consider having Korean nationality and being born in Korea as necessary for labeling someone as a Korean. If Korean immigrants continued to hold the same definition of a genuine Korean as the natives did, then they would be forced to label themselves as non-Koreans. As a result, the Koreans overseas

have created a hybrid-definition of a genuine Korean.

Additionally, with less than two percent of the population in South Korea being foreigners, the likelihood of interracial or interethnic marriages occurring is statistically insignificant. As a result of this homogenous ethnic composition, most people consider out-marriage to have occurred if the couple came from two different social classes, regions, or religions. However, in a multicultural society like the United States, minority group status is regarded as a more important identity marker than the social divisions within each group. Koreans in the United States are collectively called "Koreans" and no other distinctions are made on a sub-group level. Consequently, a sense of belonging and identity is developed with this generalization. This newly created identification then becomes the new boundary to distinguish from their similar kind to the others. The definition of endogamy among Koreans overseas is marrying another Korean who can speak Korean and comes from a family with traceable history back to South Korea; the definition of exogamy is marrying someone who does not fit neatly into this "Korean" category. This process broadens the scope of endogamy for Koreans in the United States.

*The Usage of the Term "Korean"*

Throughout this thesis, I simply use the term "Korean" to describe my research participants. I am specifically avoiding the use of the term, "Korean-American" because this term stresses the importance of citizenship status rather than heritage and cultural identity. Many of my participants neither had American citizenship nor the desire to permanently reside in the United States. For the purposes of my research, "Korean" is a collective term that describes individuals living in the United States who are of Korean

descent or who identify themselves as culturally Korean. Likewise, the term "Korean natives" will specifically be used to describe Koreans living in South Korea.

## Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review

This chapter will first explain how the marital practices have changed throughout history in South Korea. Then it will discuss the immigration history of Koreans to the United States and its possible influence on the marriage patterns that are observed today. Afterwards, theories and works that scholars have developed over the years regarding ethnic and racial exogamy will be examined thoroughly.

### *History of Marriage in South Korea*

The traditional form of marital practice can be traced back to the days of Three Kingdoms of Korea - *Goguryeo*, *Baekje* and *Silla*. In all three kingdoms, although monogamy was encouraged by law, it was not strictly enforced, making polygyny the most widespread form of marriage in this period (Bae 113). Among the three kingdoms, *Silla* was particular about maintaining social boundaries between each caste (115). The caste system, *Golpumjedo*, had eight levels. The two highest ranks were called *sunggol* and *jingol* and they were reserved for members of the royal family. The rest of the ranks were numbered from 1 to 6, with 6 indicating the highest social status. All people were born into a certain caste and they retained their status for life. From clothing colors to occupations, *Silla* government controlled its citizens' daily life very rigidly. Marriage was not an exception; all citizens of *Silla* were to marry someone from their own caste and any violation to this decree was not tolerated. When *Silla* successfully unified *Goguryeo* and *Baekje* into a single nation in 668 C.E., Silla's marriage customs carried

over, maintaing social class endogamy until 1897, the era of foreign diplomacy and oppression.

As Korea began to accept Western values and customs, the caste system quickly declined, making it difficult to maintain the original marriage system. Simultaneously, with increasing foreign interference and invasions, Koreans began to develop a new sense of a belonging and identity based on ethnic homogeneity. "Using a new collective identity as a means of unity and survival, Koreans began to see themselves as 'one nation' and to reinterpret their past in this light" (Y. Lee 366). Furthermore, this new pride and sentiment also served as the identity marker that allowed the people to learn who was an insider and who was not, ultimately changing the definition of endogamy – from social class to ethnicity.

In recent years, due to developments in technology and commerce, South Korea has accepted many new immigrants from countries like Vietnam and China (368). Although some speculate that Korea is slowly but surely transitioning to a true multicultural society, the majority of Korean natives continue to maintain the nation's ethnic homogeneity through ethnic endogamy. In fact, the concept of Korean homogeneity is taught in school from a young age; the government believes that this reinforces and strengthens the ethnic tie uniting Koreans and continues to encourage the limitation of ethnic diversity in Korea by encouraging ethnic endogamy (Kang).

*Immigration History and Pattern*

According to the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program, the earliest documented immigration of Koreans to the United States occurred in Honolulu Harbor,

Hawaii, on January 13, 1903. The first group of Korean-Americans consisted of 120 men, women, and children. Most of the new immigrants became low-wage laborers in sugar plantations. To fill the increasing need for laborers, over 7,000 young bachelors moved to the United States over the next few years. Around this time, small numbers of Koreans began to settle in California, mostly in San Francisco and Los Angeles. However, the Immigration Act of 1924, a federal law that strictly limited the immigration of Asians into the United States, halted this initial wave of immigration. As a result, no Koreans were admitted to the United States as immigrants between 1924 and 1945. Due to the unequal gender ratio and anti-miscegenation laws, many of the Koreans who had already settled in the United States remained single throughout their lives.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 eventually removed the ban on immigration. The Act removed the racial restrictions in immigration and began to accept more immigrants from Asia. Koreans took advantage of this new law: during these years, 1 out of 3 Asian immigrants were Korean. This accelerated rate of Korean immigration continued until the 1980s. The sudden decline of Korean immigration after the 1980s is thought to be a result of improved political and economic conditions in South Korea (Yu et al. 3).

In the United States, Koreans faced many difficulties while adjusting to a new way of life. One particularly challenging task for immigrants was establishing their role in the workforce. Due to their limited knowledge of the English language, many Koreans could not continue to work in the field for which they had been trained in Korea. Furthermore, anti-miscegenation laws prohibited marriages between whites and non-whites, because endogamy served to maintain the whites' power and privileges in the

United States (Lee and Fernandez 324). Due to severe racial prejudice and discrimination, Koreans, like many other minority groups, formed ethnic enclaves.

This social isolation is still observed to some degree, as evidenced by the Population Census 2000. Data suggest that 24 percent of all Koreans in the United States live in Los Angeles and its surrounding areas and nearly 16 percent reside in the New York metropolitan area (Yu et al. 6). Furthermore, nearly 75 percent of the Korean population in the United States is concentrated in just ten states with large metropolitan cities (e.g. New York, California), suggesting that Koreans, like other East Asians, are geographically concentrated. One speculation for such phenomenon is an "urban-to-urban migration, from large urban centers of South Korea to the large metropolitan areas of the United States" (Yu et al. 6).

All these factors – the embedded nationalism sentiment, distribution pattern, ethnic concentrations, and history of oppression and racism – contribute to Korean immigrants' preference in marrying other Koreans. However, scholars report that ethnic endogamy is less observed among the second and beyond generations (Okamoto 1392). This generational change is understandable because Korean natives' national identity formation occurs in school, where textbooks and teachers teach and promote the concept of a homogenous Korea. Without this kind of education, it may be difficult for the second and beyond generations to develop such a strong pride in ethnic homogeneity and future generations may even lack the understanding of historical practices used to preserve the society.

*Types of Intermarriage*

Among scholars, intermarriage is defined as "a process by which group members cross a recognized boundary with increasing frequency and eventually so often that the boundary becomes blurred or disappears" (Perlmann and Waters 110). Because of the implications regarding identity formation and multiculturalism, intermarriage has been a topic of interest for many social scientists.

Three different types of intermarriage are commonly known and frequently studied by anthropologists: interracial marriage, interethnic marriage, and interreligious or interfaith marriage. Some of the less recognized fields include socio-economic exogamy, regional exogamy, and intergenerational marriage to name a few. Due to the lack of racial diversity and removal of anti-miscegenation laws in the mid to late 20th century, much of the early research among American scholars on intermarriages has been focused around interreligious marriages. Farber, Gordon, and Mayer observed this type of intermarriage in their work. They examined the formation and loss of religious identity among Jews in metropolitan neighborhoods of Kansas City who engaged in interreligious marriages (223). Despite the tremendous amount of research available on interfaith marriages, I will focus solely on interracial and interethnic marriage.

*The Development of Intermarriage Studies Among Scholars*

Among the early studies on interracial and interethnic marriages, there is a general consensus that integration and assimilation into the mainstream culture are the main reasons for such marriages (Gordon 137). This belief was supported by the works of Lieberson and Waters, who noted the successful assimilation of European immigrants

in the early 20th century (42). Assimilation theory remained popular even in the late 20th century among scholars like Ronald E. Hall. In 1997, Hall published an article that supported the theory and specifically argued that eurogamy – Asians strategically marrying Caucasians – is the only way for Asians to fit into the majority in the United States. More specifically, he states that by engaging in an interracial marriage with a Caucasian, "the idealized light skin and round eyes then qualify Asian-Americans for assimilation and the commensurate quality of life" (405).

More recent works have challenged this traditional assimilationist view. Qian and Lichter proposed that the immigration pattern of the 21st century is very different than that of the early 20th century due to the influx of immigrants from Asia and Latin America (289). Using the 1990 Census data, they concluded that a large percentage of new immigrants tended to follow racial endogamy rather than marrying Whites (304). Furthermore, immigrants were more likely to marry endogamously than their US-born counterparts (298). However, as the years of residence in the United States increased, they found that the traditional assimilation theory was more prevalent and that younger Asians and Latinos were more likely to engage in exogamy (308).

Jacobs and Labov recognized the importance of studying minority groups independently because each ethnic group has different immigration histories, affecting their marital patterns (622). They argue that "no single theory is capable of accounting for all features of the intermarriage patterns of all groups" (622) and tests Merton's theory of gender in affecting intermarriage rates. The researchers noted that Asian-American groups contradict Merton's explanation of gender effect, that more Asian women were likely to marry out than men (623). They attribute this finding to the war-

bride history among Asian-Americans, stating that the "war-bride pattern is clearly more significant for some Asian groups, such as Koreans, than for others" (626).

Lee et al. also mentioned the importance of Korean war-bride history. In their attempt to explain the increase of international marriages in South Korea in recent years, they contributed the war-bride phenomenon as the beginning of the movement (165). Specifically, as more immigrant foreign spouses became visible in South Korea, it "challenged the long-held image of a homogeneous Korean society" (166) and eventually made women marrying a foreign spouse more acceptable among some Korean natives.

While many researchers agree that Asian women are more likely to marry exogamously than Asian men, there are dissenting opinions on which set of indicators best explains this phenomenon. For example, Lee and Boyd thought that the positive portrayal of Asian women in American popular media as exotic and feminine might have increased interest among non-Asian men (316). On the other hand, Okamoto believed that the influence of family and cultural norms affected Asian-Americans' marriage choices (1394). She specifically wrote, "it could be that families exert more pressure on men to endogamously marry for cultural continuity, and that Asian women seek marriages outside of the group to avoid a traditional family structure and patriarchal cultural norms" (1394).

Currently, with increasing immigration in the United States, more researchers are trying to identify third party factors that explain the ethnic and racial exogamy among minority groups in the United States. One characteristic that captured the attention of many social scientists is the nativity and generational differences of the subjects. Since most second and later generations of Asians in the United States complete high levels of

education and speak fluent English, they have an easier time moving into the mainstream society (Min and Kim 448). Their status as an assimilated immigrant "has helped to break down the white-Asian racial boundary" (448).

Recent research has found that interethnic marriage rates are much higher than those of interracial marriages (Lee and Fernandez 329; Okamoto 1394). Scholars are attributing this observation to the possible formation of pan-Asian identity. Supporters of this pan-Asian identity often relate it back to the assimilation theory and believe that it is a natural course of integration, saying that "immigrants and their descendants gradually merge into established and more inclusive groups in the United States" (Okamoto 1408). However, this is not the only school of thought. Kibria thought that pan-Asian identity formation is not as easy or smooth process as it may appear because "Asian Americans as a group are extremely diverse, in terms of generation, class and nationality" (527). She added that "the very construct of 'Asian American' is a pre-eminently political and strategic one, driven by political goals rather than a sense of cultural commonality" (526). As a result, she set out to understand how the Asian-origin individual interprets the racial label by conducting interviews with Chinese-Americans and Korean-Americans. Kibria found that while the Korean and Chinese interviewees did not mind marrying each other or other east Asians, they regarded the Vietnamese and Filipino as somehow different (534). She noted that many of her participants thought east Asians share similar expectations and upbringings that made them feel connected (536). Ultimately, this work questions the formation of social identity among ethnic minorities in a multicultural society in the long-term. This finding may also have larger implications for the definition of endogamy and exogamy.

*Limitations in Literature*

The anthropological field offers limited data and literature on endogamy and exogamy in the United States. Most of the articles that have been published are based on sociologists' research. Due to the nature of their research methods, I have encountered mostly statistical data and other quantitative methods. Although many use reliable resources such as the Census data, Min and Kim found a critical error in calculating intermarriage rates among Asian-Americans. They argued that because most researchers include individuals who were born in the United States before 1965, the analysis revealed unexpectedly high intermarriage rates (448). In particular, they stated that some scholars have shown that US-born Koreans exhibited the highest intermarriage rate (70 percent) among all Asian groups in 1990 (454). The validity of theses findings is questionable "given Korean immigrants' great group homogeneity and strong ethnic networks" (455). It is difficult to understand why Korean-Americans married out in such incredible rate. Min and Kim believed that the number is overestimated due to the inclusion of pre-1965 individuals into the calculation (455).

While many works have relied heavily on quantitative data, there has been research, which used qualitative methods. One particular study used interviews to explain the reasons for exogamy among the minorities in the United States. Fong and Yung engaged in in-depth interviews with their participants – composed of nineteen Chinese-Americans and Japanese-Americans – to find the factors that affected their decisions to marry exogamously. Through the qualitative approach, Fong and Yung found that interracial marriage is not directly related to one's exposure to white Americans, but a result of a number of complex factors, such as cultural affinity,

unavailability of same-race and same-ethnic partner, and love (93). One interesting indicator that statistical data could not reveal was the power relations in a traditional Asian family. Many female informants answered that they wished to marry exogamously to escape the Asian patriarchy and have a more egalitarian-structured family (93).

Although the literature on endogamy and exogamy among minorities in the United States is growing, there is a significant lack of research about Korean-Americans in general. For example, Fong and Yung chose to focus only on Chinese-Americans and Japanese-Americans because of their long presence in the United States (77). They also stated that their subjects were the first ethnic groups to marry interracially in substantial numbers (77). Therefore, this thesis will act as a helpful resource in understanding the marital patterns Koreans follow in the United States.

*Lack of Categorical Identities*

Race and ethnic identity are markers that can easily identify the similarities and differences among individuals in the United States (Calhoun 211). These are ubiquitous terms that are essential in identity formation in American society. However, these words are used interchangeably in South Korea. It is believed that incredible racial and ethnic homogeneity in South Korea makes it unnecessary for such distinctions to exist. This case is further applied to intermarriage contexts. Since there are no words to describe "race" and "ethnic" in Korean, a Korean speaker does not distinguish the difference between interracial and interethnic marriages; instead, the term "international marriage" is used to encompass all types of intermarriages. This phenomenon was observed and documented by Lee et al. Their study addressed the reasons why South Korea saw a

significant increase – from 4.6 to 13.6 percent over a four-year period – in international marriage rates among Korean males in the recent years (179). In their work, although they frequently use the term "international marriage" to refer to a Korean marrying a non-Korean individual, terms like interracial and interethnic marriages are never mentioned.

The lack of such terms is significant in understanding the meaning of exogamous marriages among Koreans. Since the term "international marriage" is a comprehensive term that describes all types of exogamy (interracial, interethnic, interreligious), the social norms that are broken and rules that are violated with such marriages are much heavier for Koreans. Because the Korean language limits its speakers in characterizing different forms of intermarriages, the act of marrying out can be simultaneously interpreted as merging with "outsiders" in every aspect. This also leads to confusion and misinterpretation in conversations because the listener is unable to differentiate to which specific type of marriage the speaker is referring. These misunderstandings accumulate and depict exogamy as something scary and forbidden. As a result, it is much harder for Koreans to accept any form of exogamy.

*Study Questions*

From what the literature review has revealed, I would like to propose two more hypotheses. First, I expect to find that more women will be more tolerant to the idea of marrying exogamously than men because of patriarchal family structure in traditional Korean families and the war-bride history in the United States. Second, with the constant increase of the Korean population in the United States, I hypothesize that assimilation of

the immigrants into the mainstream society is less important today; hence I expect to observe decreased importance and interest of integration among my participants.

In summation, there are many factors that contribute to one's marriage choice. However, I recognize that each ethnic group is different from one another due to varying historical and immigration experiences in the United States. Although they may have similarities to some degree, findings on other minority groups' marriage patterns will not perfectly explain those of Koreans in the United States. Therefore, for the sake of this research, I will only monitor the following variables: the levels of association with Korean culture, role of gender, nativity and generational differences, role of family and friends, and self-identity.

# Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

As suggested by the previous chapter, both quantitative and qualitative approaches have their strengths and weaknesses. As a result, I have decided to incorporate both methods in the hope that my approach will yield a more thorough data base. This chapter summarizes the demographics of the participant pool, the recruitment process, and the data collection process.

## *Participants*

Two separate recruitments were made in this study. The first recruitment (survey recruitment) was designed to obtain participants who would partake in the survey portion of the research; the second recruitment (interview recruitment) was to gather participants for personal interviews.

One hundred participants agreed to take the survey. All participants were between the age of 25 to 35 and the sample population was equally divided by gender. All participants were self-identified Korean, Korean-American, or of Korean-heritage who currently reside in the United States. A variety of cities were represented, including Atlanta, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and New York. All participants were college-educated and some held graduate or professional degrees. There was no monetary compensation for their participation. They were granted access to this thesis when published.

The interview recruitment occurred after the completion of the surveys. On each survey, the participants were asked to indicate their interest in participating further in this

study. If they responded positively, they were asked to voluntarily provide their contact information to be reached at a later time. Based on their response, I selected thirty possible interviewees, varying in gender. Of the thirty, fifteen responded that they had desires to marry endogamously and fifteen wanted to practice exogamy.

*Procedure*

I recruited my participants through friends and acquaintances. In cities where I had contacts, I initiated the communication (via phone and email) and asked if they were willing to participate in my survey. In the case I did not personally know anyone from a city, I had to ask friends who knew people living in that city. If the participant resided in Atlanta and its surrounding areas, I distributed the survey personally. Otherwise, all surveys were sent out as an email attachment.

Prior to the survey, all participants gave their informed consent, then completed the survey and were asked to decide if they wanted to be interviewed in the near future. Surveys were written only in English. All possible interviewees were contacted within two weeks from the time they completed the surveys. I interviewed each informant in a semi-structured fashion for approximately two hours either at their residence or at a mutually agreed upon location. If a personal meeting could not be established, then a phone interview took place instead. Interviews were carried out in both Korean and English, depending on the interviewee's preference. All interviews were recorded using a tape recorder and transcribed within forty-eight hours of the occurrence.

*Measures*

In the first section of the survey, I asked all participants to report their gender, place of birth, number of years they have resided in the United States, occupation, and other demographic information. The second part addressed the marital status of the participants and asked if they had married or are planning to marry endogamously or exogamously. Participants were also asked: "In relation to choosing marriage partners, indicate how important are each of the following criteria: love, marrying within my own ethnic group (Korean) / race (Asian), marrying within my own religion, approval of parents of the marriage, and financial and occupational success of partner." Participants were given a 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important) Likert scale. In the last segment of the survey, participants answered questions regarding their involvement in the Korean culture in relation to television, local communities, church and other religious organizations, and traveling patterns. They were also asked to mention if they had known any family member who had married exogamously.

Interviews contained more open-ended questions for me to gain more insight into the participants' survey responses. Interviews yielded much more detailed and personal accounts of their thoughts and experiences. Although the interviews were not formally structured, there was a set of pre-written questions that guided the interview. Some of the topics that were discussed included issues of self-identification, gender, cultural expectations, norms, responsibilities, parental and social influences, and sense of belonging in a community. During the interview, all participants were asked to define what marriage meant for them: is it a personal choice or a social obligation? If the

participant had already married, then they were asked to indicate the factors that contributed the most in their decision to marry either endogamously or exogamously.

# Chapter 4: Results from the Surveys

Because the scope of this thesis is to compare endogamy and exogamy, I decided to divide my participant group into two sub-groups. Group A represents the participants that preferred ethnic endogamy and Group B corresponds to those wanting ethnic and racial exogamy.

## *Demographics*

Among the hundred participants I surveyed, there was nearly an even divide among people who preferred ethnic endogamy and those who preferred ethnic and racial exogamy (47 percent and 53 percent, respectively). In Group A, about 74 percent of the group was composed of males and 26 percent made up the females. Conversely, Group B exhibited higher proportion of women to men (72 percent and 28 percent, respectively). Twenty-three singles, nineteen people who were in a relationship or engaged, and five married individuals composed Group A, whereas Group B was made up of ten singles, thirty-five individuals in a relationship or engaged, and eight married subjects.

All participants had completed some form of post-secondary education. In Group A, forty people reported that the highest level of educational attainment was college and seven reported completing graduate/professional school. Group B consisted of twenty-three individuals who completed college and thirty people who graduated from graduate/professional school. The seven participants who attended graduate or professional school from Group A were all males. Among the thirty who attended

**Table 1A. Demographical Analysis**

| | Group A | | Group B | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| *Group Size* | 47 | 100 | 53 | 100 |
| *Gender* | | | | |
| Male | 35 | 74 | 15 | 28 |
| Female | 12 | 26 | 38 | 72 |
| *Marital status* | | | | |
| Single | 23 | 49 | 10 | 19 |
| In a relationship /engaged | 19 | 40 | 35 | 66 |
| Married | 5 | 11 | 8 | 15 |
| *Education level* | | | | |
| College | 40 | 85 | 23 | 43 |
| Graduate /professional school | 7 | 15 | 30 | 47 |
| *Years of residence* | | | | |
| Less than 1 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 1 ~ 4 | 8 | 17 | 0 | 0 |
| 5 ~ 9 | 18 | 38 | 10 | 19 |
| 10 or more | 19 | 40 | 43 | 81 |
| *Interest in settling permanently* | | | | |
| Yes | 13 | 28 | 50 | 94 |
| No | 19 | 40 | 0 | 0 |
| Unsure | 15 | 32 | 3 | 6 |
| *Experience with dating non-Korean* | | | | |
| Yes | 33 | 70 | 46 | 87 |
| No | 14 | 30 | 7 | 13 |

graduate or professional school in Group B, twenty-one were women and nine were men (see Table 1B).

My participants reported varying lengths of residence in the United States. Out of the hundred informants, two responded that they have lived in the United States for less than a year, eight reported 1 to 4 years, twenty-eight reported 5 to 9 years, and sixty-two reported residence of 10 or more years. All respondents who have resided in the United States for less than a year or 1 to 4 years reported that they wanted to follow ethnic endogamy. Among the twenty-eight who reported 5 to 9 years of residence in the United States, eighteen belonged to Group A and ten were in Group B. For the participants who have resided in the United States for more than 10 years, nineteen said that they were committed to marrying another Korean, whereas forty-three said that they preferred ethnic or racial exogamy. When I asked my participants if they were interested in settling down in the United States permanently, participants from Group A varied in their response (13 yes, 19 no, and 15 uncertain), whereas Group B exhibited a highly consistent answer (50 yes, 0 no, and 3 unsure). I also asked if they had experience dating a non-Korean. Interestingly, the majority of the participants from both groups said that they have dated (or are currently dating) a non-Korean. There were 33 participants from Group A who had dated exogamously and 46 from Group B. There were twice as many participants who lacked the experience of dating a non-Korean in Group A than Group B (14 to 7, respectively).

The data reveal a few points to consider. It appears that people who have resided in the United States for shorter periods of time tend to gravitate toward ethnic endogamy. Recent immigrants may be unfamiliar with their new country's culture and they may continue to embrace and follow their native traditions and expectations instead. Another variable that stood out was the participants' certainty regarding plans to settle

permanently in the United States. The statistics suggests that people who were certain that they would return to South Korea opted to marry endogamously, whereas the participants who prefer exogamy answered that they are staying in the United States permanently. This alludes to define the social norms and acceptable behaviors in South Korea and United States. Because of the low ethnic and racial exogamy rates in South Korea, having a non-Korean spouse will make one stand out significantly. To avoid unwanted attention, people may choose to marry endogamously. In contrast, interethnic and interracial marriages are more common in a multicultural society like the United States, making such exogamies more acceptable. Therefore, individuals who are certain that they will reside in the United States do not limit themselves to ethnic endogamy.

The results from non-Korean dating experience question leads to a new sub-category in the research, the standards for dating versus marriage. Although more people from Group A responded that they have never dated a non-Korean before, a vast majority of both Group A and B (70 and 87 percent, respectively) answered that they have been in an interracial or interethnic relationship before. The fact that the majority of Group A had also dated a non-Korean before leads me to conclude that my participants have different standards for dating and marriage. In other words, it was acceptable for some to date exogamously, but not beyond casual relationships. This implies that dating is something that is inconsequential, whereas marriage is something that deserves careful deliberation.

*Prioritizing Factors in Choosing Marriage Partners*

The second part of the survey asked the participants to rate the importance of

certain criteria in choosing a potential marriage partner. The factors were a) Love, b) Marrying within my own ethnic group (Korean) or race (Asian), c) Marrying within my own religion, d) Approval of parents of the marriage, and e) Financial and occupational success of partner. Each participant was asked to rate each criterion based on his or her personal importance. Participants were asked to use a five-level Likert rating scale with 1 being *Very Important* and 5 being *Not Important At All*.

When asked to rate the importance of love in choosing a marriage partner, participants from Group A presented highly varying answers: five considered love *very important*, ten thought it was *important*, twenty-one said it was *fairly important*, and eleven responded that it was not *very important*. It should be noted that over 65 percent of the subjects reported love is only a slightly important or not a very important factor. In contrast, the responses from Group B were indicative of the opposing ideology; all participants evaluated love as either *very important* or *important* (forty-seven answered *very important* and six said *important*, to be exact). No individual chose *not important at all* as his or her answer.

For the question regarding ethnic and racial endogamy, all Group A participants rated it within 1 to 3, indicating the importance of this indicator. Thirty individuals said that it was very important, nine thought it was important, and five responded that it was somewhat important (70 percent, 19 percent, and 11 percent, respectively). Group B showed that ethnic and racial endogamy was not of personal importance when discussing marriage. Over half of the participants in Group B reported that ethnic and racial endogamy is not important at all and nearly 30 percent of the individuals felt that it was simply not important.

**Table 2A. Evaluation of Priorities in Choosing Marriage Partners Using Five-level Likert item**

| | Group A | | Group B | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| *Group Size* | 47 | 47 | 53 | 53 |
| *Love* | | | | |
| 1 | 5 | 11 | 47 | 89 |
| 2 | 10 | 21 | 6 | 11 |
| 3 | 21 | 45 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | 11 | 23 | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Ethnic and racial endogamy* | | | | |
| 1 | 33 | 70 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 9 | 19 | 2 | 4 |
| 3 | 5 | 11 | 4 | 8 |
| 4 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 28 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 | 32 | 60 |
| *Religious endogamy* | | | | |
| 1 | 12 | 26 | 4 | 8 |
| 2 | 18 | 38 | 6 | 11 |
| 3 | 14 | 30 | 19 | 36 |
| 4 | 3 | 6 | 23 | 43 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| *Approval of parents* | | | | |
| 1 | 26 | 55 | 5 | 9 |
| 2 | 10 | 21 | 11 | 21 |
| 3 | 8 | 17 | 14 | 26 |
| 4 | 2 | 4 | 21 | 40 |
| 5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| *Financial/occupational success of the partner* | | | | |
| 1 | 4 | 9 | 17 | 32 |
| 2 | 6 | 13 | 19 | 36 |
| 3 | 13 | 28 | 10 | 19 |
| 4 | 23 | 49 | 4 | 8 |
| 5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 |

* 1 = very important; 2 = important; 3 = fairly important; 4 = not important; 5 = not important at all

A similar pattern, though not as drastic, was observed when participants were asked to assess the importance of religious endogamy. In Group A, the rating of *2: Important* received the highest vote, followed by *3: Fairly important* and *1: Very important*. In Group B, the majority of the informants answered that it is not very important.

Group A generally regarded approval of parents of the marriage very highly. Over 75 percent thought approval of parents in their marriage was important. Although nearly 40 percent of Group B thought parents' approval of their marriage as not highly important, the majority of the participants seemed to recognize the importance in varying degrees.

Informants from the two groups seemed to consider the importance of financial and occupational success of their marriage partner in a converse manner. Half of Group A decided that economic strength of a partner is not very important in considering them as a mate. Alternatively, a high percentage (68 percent) of Group B tended to emphasize importance in their potential partner's economic success.

Another analysis was conducted, using gender to subdivide the participants (see Table 2B). For love, male participants from Group B and female participants from both groups generally considered it important; a majority of them rated love as *1: Very Important*. In contrast, male subjects from Group A collectively gave a slightly lower rating for love. Although both males and females from Group A thought ethnic and racial endogamy was an important factor, men regarded it much more importantly than women did. For Group B, both genders answered that it was not too important of a factor.

Participants answered differently when I asked them to prioritize religious endogamy and approval of parents in choosing a potential marriage partner. For men in Group A, the majority (40 percent) answered that it was important, followed by 34 percent responding that it is somewhat important, 17 percent saying that it is very important, and the rest thinking it was not very important. Ratings from women in Group A also indicated the importance of maintaining religious endogamy as well. Six women said that it was very important, four thought it was important, and two responded that it is somewhat important. In contrast, majority of both males and females (73 percent and 82 percent, respectively) from Group B did not consider religious endogamy as a highly important factor.

Both genders from Group A thought that parents' approval was an important factor. Among the male participants, 94 percent of the participants gave the criterion a rating between 1 and 3. Similarly, 92 percent the female participants also thought it was an important factor in choosing a marriage partner. Group B's response showed an opposite pattern; 40 percent of the men from Group B said that parents' approval is not important. Similarly, 39 percent of the women from Group B also said that they do not regard parents' approval very importantly.

While both genders from Group B considered financial success important (93 percent men and 85 percent women gave a rating between 1 and 3), Group A showed a discrepancy. The majority of men from Group A thought financial success was not an important factor in deciding a marriage partner; however, all women pointed out that it is important.

Some additional findings are noteworthy. Although love was unanimously deemed important by both Group A and B, it was revealed that only women from Group A considered it with important. Male participants and a few female participants from Group A reported marrying-in was the most important factor. These results led me to believe that participants contrast love (the factor that majority of Group B valued highly) and ethnic endogamy (factor that Group A – especially the men – considered important) as opposites.

One interesting discovery is the participants' ratings for financial and occupational success of the partner. Males from Group A were the only ones to consider it "not important." This may have resulted from the patriarchal system many Korean families often implement in their household. Because women were traditionally denied access to family's financial resources and forbidden from having a job, the sentiment may still be lingering among my participants. This would also explain why all female participants from Group A considered financial success of the partner important.

*Personal Activities and Lifestyle*

In an attempt to determine the effect of participants' daily exposure to Korean culture and customs, the third part of the survey was designed to review the surveyor's activity and lifestyle. The first question asked was formulated to learn about participants' television habits. I was most interested in participants' viewership of Korean programming and how it affects their sense of participation in Korean culture.

It was discovered that the majority of both Group A and Group B reported viewing Korean television on a regular basis. In both groups, 1 to 4 hours of Korean

**Table 3. Activities and Lifestyle**

| | Group A | | Group B | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| *Group Size* | 47 | 47 | 53 | 53 |
| *Hours spent watching Korean television per week* | | | | |
| None | 1 | 2.1 | 7 | 13.2 |
| 1 ~ 4 | 35 | 74.5 | 42 | 79.2 |
| 5 ~ 9 | 8 | 17.0 | 3 | 5.7 |
| More than 10 | 3 | 5.7 | 0 | 0.0 |
| *Attending Korean church* | | | | |
| Yes | 36 | 76.6 | 18 | 34.0 |
| No | 11 | 23.4 | 35 | 66.0 |
| *Frequency of visiting Korea* | | | | |
| Less than once a year | 17 | 36.1 | 41 | 77.4 |
| Once a year | 26 | 55.4 | 7 | 13.2 |
| Twice a year | 4 | 8.5 | 5 | 9.4 |
| More than twice a year | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| *Parents in the United States* | | | | |
| Yes | 39 | 83.0 | 50 | 94.3 |
| No | 8 | 7.0 | 3 | 5.7 |
| *Interaction with parents per Week* | | | | |
| Less than 1 hour | 17 | 36.2 | 23 | 43.4 |
| 1 ~ 4 hours | 19 | 40.4 | 20 | 37.7 |
| 5 ~ 9 hours | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 5.7 |
| More than 10 hours | 11 | 23.4 | 7 | 13.2 |
| *Korean population in city of Residence* | | | | |
| Less than 10,000 | 11 | 23.4 | 13 | 24.5 |
| More than 10,000 | 36 | 76.6 | 40 | 75.4 |

programming per week was the metric receiving the highest number of votes. However, among the eight people who said that they do not watch Korean television at all, seven belonged to Group B.

I also asked about attendance to Korean churches. My experience in the United States has taught me that churches and other religious organizations often tend to function as a community center for many immigrants and their family members. Therefore, I wanted to figure out if active attendees of these religious organizations were more likely to choose ethnic endogamy. My data showed that 77 percent of individuals in Group A responded that they attend a Korean church. Interestingly, the majority of participants in Group B answered that they do not attend a Korean church.

Frequency of visits to South Korea was another variable being tested. I wanted to know if visiting participants' country of origin had the potential to shift the participants' self-identity. I also hoped to explore how that sense of belonging affects the choice in marriage partner. Overall, it was revealed that thirty (64 percent) individuals from Group A travel to South Korea at least once a year, compared to twelve (22 percent) from Group B. The raw data did not yield a clear correlation. However, upon comparing the percentages for both groups, I realized that Group A had more people who will travel to South Korea than Group B.

To explore the influence of parents, participants were asked to indicate if their parents were currently living in the United States and how often they interact with their parents in a week. It was found that both groups were very similar in their answers regarding parental involvement in their lives. The majority of both groups' parents live in the United States and the distribution of frequency of interaction was also very similar. It was found that if the participant was living with his or her parents, then the interaction was inevitably over 10 hours per week. However, if the participant was living outside the parents' home, then the frequency of interaction decreased.

The last question I asked was to identify city of residence. Specifically, I asked if the participant was living in a city with a Korean population of at least 10,000. Many scholars believe that a concentrated Korean population in a city increases the availability and marriage pool, thereby increasing the chance of ethnic endogamy (Lee and Boyd 316). I wanted to know if this trend was evident among my participants. A great majority – over 70 percent in both groups – lived in a city with a large Korean population, thereby contradicting the trend in other research studies.

## Chapter 5: Results from the Interviews

This chapter is solely focused on the data collected from the thirty interviews I have conducted. This chapter will seek to support and explain the findings from *Chapter 4: Results from the Surveys*. Occasionally, the participants who prefer ethnic endogamy will collectively be called Group A and the participants who favor ethnic and racial exogamy will be labeled Group B.

### *Immigration History and Experiences*

The survey questioned participants' length of residence in the United States. However, because the responses were reported in a predetermined metric of years, it was unclear whether an individual is a US-born individual or an immigrant who has resided in the United States for a long period of time. During the interview, this ambiguity was clarified and it was discovered that second and later generations had much higher likelihood of marrying a non-Korean. When asked about the tendency to marry out, Alice Kim, a third-generation Korean-American, answered:

> Well, but I'm American. Yeah, my ancestors may have lived in Korea a long time ago, but my grandfather, my dad, and everyone else [in my family] all live in the United States. My dad and my mom both spoke English in our home, we didn't really eat Korean food, and I was the only Asian in my school. I didn't really learn Korean culture as I was growing up. So if I were to marry a Korean guy who knows a lot about Korean culture, then I would feel really awkward. (I: Awkward? Could you

> elaborate?) Okay, for example, if my future Korean husband expected me to prepare Korean meals, I wouldn't know what to do. Or when he starts speaking in Korean. I wouldn't understand what he's saying. That doesn't sound very much like a married couple to me.

Alice's statement suggests that among second and later generational Koreans, Korean culture must be learned in order to be familiar with it. Furthermore, without extensive knowledge of Korean culture, it becomes difficult to develop a Korean ethnic identity. Thus, because Alice is a self-identified American, it is no surprise that she wants to marry another American, who would share similar values and beliefs.

Age at the time of immigration was another important factor in determining marriage preferences. Generally, if an individual immigrated to the United States at a young age, he was more likely to choose ethnic or racial exogamy. Min-ju Kim, a 30-year-old Korean who followed her parents to the United States in 2006, shared her observation:

> I came to the United States when I was 27, which is relatively late. So I still hold many Korean ideologies. But my younger siblings, they are different. They were much younger when we moved here and forgot what it means to be a Korean. They can't speak Korean fluently and most of their friends are American. My younger brother is currently engaged to a White American woman. My parents weren't happy, but they eventually accepted it (translated).

She added, "Since my siblings went to school in the United States, they were more exposed to the mainstream American culture than I was. They needed to make the

cultural transition in order to fit in" (translated). From this information, it appears that social institutions such as schools function to increase contact and interactions with those outside the minority group, thereby facilitating the assimilation process.

The city of residence is yet another dimension to consider. Historically, Koreans lived in high concentration near metropolitan areas. A large population of Koreans in one region allows for more frequent interactions among the members of the minority group and facilitates the formation of ethnic identity and pride. Jason Kwon, who was born and raised in Los Angeles, California, commented:

> My parents sent me to a private school ran by Korean people, rather than public school. So all of my classmates were Korean and even my teachers were Korean. The apartment we lived in was also full of Koreans too. So everywhere I went, it was cool to be a Korean…I didn't know that my way of life was special until college; I never really knew what it felt like to be a minority until then. That's why I moved back to L.A after I married. I wanted my kids to have the same [life I had].

Like Jason, other participants who lived in New York and Atlanta embraced and celebrated their ethnic identity. In addition to developing a strong sense of Korean pride, Jason discussed how growing up in a city with a large Korean population affected his marital preference. He said, "Both of my parents are Korean, all of my friends' parents are Koreans, and all the people I knew were dating and marrying Koreans. So I thought it was the normal thing to do." Although no one explicitly stated that ethnic endogamy is expected among Koreans, Jason assumed that it is "normal" for a Korean to marry another Korean.

Koreans living in more isolated areas held opposite views on Korean pride and the normalcy of ethnic endogamy. Julia Chung shared her experience of living in Portland, Maine:

> Portland is the largest city in Maine, but it has no Korean population whatsoever. The closest Korean grocery is in Manchester, New Hampshire. Can you believe it? My family was crossing the state border just for groceries. So we were marked as the "weirdos" in our town, as if being the only Asians wasn't enough. And when you are young, you want anything but to stand out like that. So growing up, all I ever wanted to do was to be more like the Whites.

Among the participants that had lived in less populous towns, there was a sense of urgency to become integrated into the majority. Julia talked about her sister, Lily, who married interracially a few years ago. She said, "Lily's lifelong dream was to marry a White guy. In school, kids made fun of her a lot for being different. So she married her White Prince Charming a few years ago despite our parents' wishes. She still lives in Portland, but people respect her more now because they know her husband." Like her sister, Julia hopes to enter an interracial marriage someday.

Participants like Jason and Julia provide examples to support the theory that a larger Korean population in a city increases the likelihood of ethnic endogamy. However, it was mentioned in *Chapter 4: Results from Surveys* that my survey data contradicted this observation; 75 percent of Group B responded that they live in a city with a large Korean population (see Table 3). During the interviews with informants from Group B, I realized that a larger Korean population does not always ensure that

people will develop one particular cultural identity over another. For instance, some participants confessed that they have self-isolated themselves from Korean communities. The most common explanation for such behavior is the worried parents who fear that their children will not speak English fluently and thus be academically hindered in school if they live among other Koreans. Grace Chang, a second-generation Korean who is a native to Los Angeles, California, has parents who hold this view. She reminisced about her childhood being isolated Koreans in the city with the largest Korean population in the United States:

> In Los Angeles, especially in Koreatown, you don't have to say a single word in English and you'll get by. So I've seen some kids who never learn to speak English after 10 years [of living in the United States]…It was really important for my father that my sister and I excel in school and my parents were worried that exposure to other Koreans would slow down our learning. So we moved from Wilshire Center (district with Koreatown) to Beverly Hills when I was 5.

In Beverly Hills, Grace and her sister very rarely encountered Koreans. She recalled that she and her sister were the only Koreans in her high school. She grew up around White Americans and learned their culture and ways of socializing. Then one day, their parents suddenly requested that they marry Korean men, after isolating them from other Koreans for over 20 years. Grace recollected, "Their announcement came as such a shock to us. I didn't know any Korean guys, so even dating seemed like a big step, let alone marriage!" The long separation had shaped Grace and her sister to consider themselves more American rather than Korean. In the end, despite efforts, Grace and her sister could not

adopt a new Korean identity and her sister ended up marrying a White guy whom she met at work. This report introduced the idea that a larger Korean population simply increases the likelihood of encounters and *possible* marriage pool. The size of Korean population in a city does not indicate if an individual will indeed interact with other Koreans. Grace's example hints that people will continue to associate with people to whom they feel more connected.

*Availability of the Right Spouse*

The size of Korean population determines the availability of eligible partners. Statistically, a larger population will yield more people who are available within a group. Jason noted, "I've never dated a non-Korean in my life. I never had to; everywhere I looked around, there were at least a couple [Korean girls]." For some, however, the process was not as easy as Jason emphasized. For Jonghoon Yoo, a 28-year-old from Chattanooga, Tennessee, marrying a Korean woman was a crucial matter. He said, "My grandmother really wanted me to marry a Korean. But since I lived in a small town with a small Korean population, it was impossible to find an eligible bachelorette within my social circle." He met his current Korean fiancée who is originally from Atlanta, Georgia through a friend.

Similarly, Claire Lee-Moore, a second-generation Korean-American oncologist who married her colleague 6 years ago, commented jokingly:

> The most important factor [in choosing a marriage partner] for me was that my husband is from the same field of occupation as I am. But my parents really wanted me to marry a Korean; just anyone who is Korean. I

> tried to meet them halfway by marrying a Korean doctor, but they were all taken! So I gave up.

Like Claire, there were multiple participants from Group B who responded that they have attempted to find a Korean partner simply because of their family's desires. Many reported that it was difficult to find a spouse that met all criteria and as a result, choose personal preference over that of the family. When I asked Claire why she married interracially against her parents' wishes, she replied, "It was important that I marry somebody who I could relate to, in terms of level of knowledge, interests, and experience. My parents are not going to be the ones to live with him every day."

*Role of Gender*

The data from the surveys revealed that men preferred ethnic endogamy more than women. Different variables may have contributed to this finding. One possible explanation is the different expectations that are imposed upon the two different genders by family. Korea has traditionally used a strict form of patrilineal descent system. As a result, many Korean parents try to convince, if not force, their sons into ethnic endogamy.

Although sons are almost always encouraged to marry another Korean, the level of demand differs among the brothers. In Korea, the oldest son carries on the family name and takes charge of the wealth and property after the parents pass away. Combined with Korea's long history as a homogeneous nation, it is much more important for the oldest son to marry another Korean. This ensures that the family lineage is "100% Korean" and no stranger gets a share of the family wealth. Jonathan Park lamented about his status as the eldest:

> As long as I can remember, my parents told me that I needed to marry a Korean. They weren't suggesting it; they were telling me that it was necessary. When I was younger, my parents watched me like a hawk, making sure I didn't have any girlfriend who wasn't Korean. But my brothers, they never got censored like that. My youngest brother is in a serious relationship with this [White] Canadian girl. They didn't like her very much at the beginning, but they are cool with her now.

Jonathan's parents are not the only ones who are imposing strict expectations of endogamy upon the eldest son. Of the 8 men I interviewed from Group A, 6 of them were the eldest son in their respective families. Many of them shared similar experiences of parents' demanding ethnic endogamy. Donghyun Choi, a 27-year-old who is the eldest son in his family, shared his opinion on this issue:

> The way I look at it is that it comes with a price. I grew up with my parents treating me like a prince. My little brother and sister received less of everything: attention, allowance, toys, food, you name it. So if the only thing that my parents want me to do is to marry a Korean, I can do that; compared to all the privileges I have received and will receive in my life, that's a small price to pay.

These personal accounts given by participants who are the eldest son made it evident that treatment towards the eldest son is different and special. In both cases, the sense of fairness was questioned; for some, this meant restricting freedom and personal choice, while for others, it was a simple compensation.

Drastically different expectations are imposed on daughters. Because the practice

of affiliating the married daughter to her husband's family persists, parents generally do not bind their daughters to ethnic endogamy. Many female interviewees felt that their parents preferred ethnic endogamy because of marriage's ability to form new social ties between two families, but they felt that their parents would approve if they ultimately chose to marry interracially or interethnically. This flexibility may explain why more females are okay with interracial and interethnic marriages. Hyojung Cho reflected her own interethnic marriage experience:

> I have an older brother who married a nice Korean lady. A few years later, my longtime Chinese boyfriend, who's now my husband, proposed. I was really happy but I was sort of worried at the same time because I'd introduced him to my parents before and they weren't disapproving, but I could tell that they hoped that he was Korean instead. When I finally broke the news, they weren't exactly thrilled and overjoyed, but they congratulated me and supported my decision.

*Role of Family, Friends, and Community*

In the survey, a significant percentage (72 percent) of women answered that they wanted to marry either interracially or interethnically (see Table 1). The female participants interviewed often reported that this was largely due to their desires to escape a typical Asian patriarchal family. Hannah Richardson, a second-generation 31-year-old Korean-American woman who married a white American 6 years ago, commented:

> Growing up, I remember despising the hierarchical relationship within my family. My father's words were basically the law of our house. Not

> abiding by his law was just unacceptable, almost unthinkable. My mother had no voice in the house. She had to dress, behave, eat like my father wanted her to. So in my eyes, my family wasn't a product of love; it was more like a… [quick pause] military. My father and mother rarely communicated and even when did, it often was my father giving my mother an order or something. I just didn't want to continue that.

Another participant named Jessica Choi noted that the patriarchal relationship was observed even in the context of dating. Until college, Jessica had only dated Korean guys because her parents forbade her to date a non-Korean. With her boyfriends, she felt that "they were really bossy, always telling me to what to wear and what to say." After a series of bad experiences, she secretly decided to date a non-Korean. In college, she met Matt, a past boyfriend, who is White. She recalled, "Matt wasn't like any other guy I had dated before. He was kind, gentle, and understanding. He treated me like we were equal and I really appreciated that." After this positive experience, she has never dated another Korean. Her current boyfriend is another White male, whom she met at her place of work.

For the participants in Group A, family and history were the greatest indicators in choosing to ethnic endogamy. Some were really proud of the deep history that can be traced back to the beginning of *Joseon* era. Steven Song, a second-generation Korean, told me why he voluntarily decided to marry within the same ethnicity:

> When I was young, my father showed me our family's *jokbo* [a book that records family lineage]. Looking at that book, I felt that I am 100% Korean. Our family may be living in the United States now, but that

> doesn't change our blood. When I saw my ancestor's legacy in preserving the Korean identity [and homogeneity], I felt that I'm just a small part of all the hard work. So I felt that I need to continue the tradition.

Jason Kwon felt similarly. Besides growing up in a close-knit Korean community in Los Angeles, the relationship he maintains with his family members also influenced his decision to marry his current Korean wife. He contributed:

> My family is really close. We all live in L.A and we go to the same church. So we do weekly lunch – right after church. And that's just one thing that we do out of dozens. So it was really important for me to marry a Korean who would understand how a Korean family works and fit in seamlessly. I mean, I've heard stories about when a Korean marries a non-Korean, the family dynamics break and can't be restored.

This excerpt was used because of Jason's categorization of an insider and an outsider. Although all marriages essentially involve bringing and accepting an outsider into an established group (a family), Jason claims that he purposely married a Korean to minimize the tension that is associated with the integration of a new family member. To Jason, a Korean represents someone who is part of his social group, someone who shares his identity.

Korean churches and other religious organizations facilitate ethnic endogamy by functioning as a meeting site for all eligible bachelors and bachelorettes. The concept of Korean churches fulfilling the role of being a cultural center was common, especially among recent immigrants who favored ethnic endogamy. Although Korean churches accept new members from different backgrounds and ethnicities, the practices of Korean

churches (i.e. having services in Korean) encourage access only to the Korean population, making it a great meeting place for those who want to socialize with Koreans in large numbers. Some participants indicated high regard of the Korean church because it is the easiest and the most natural place to meet people without discomfort. Hye-yun Seo, a 33-year-old who came to the United States one year ago, explained her relationship her church:

> I'm not very religious. In fact, I wasn't even a Christian before I came to the United States. Nonetheless, I attend church because it provides me with a chance to meet and socialize other unmarried Korean guys. (I: Is there any particular reason why you chose church?") I mean, at the time, I thought it was the easiest to access. And I was desperate: you know, it just becomes so difficult for Korean women to marry when they reach 30 (translated).

When I asked the same question to the interviewees from Group B, they were not unfamiliar with the idea but could not relate to the idea's relevance in their lives.

*Exposure to Korean Culture*

This thesis is proposing that familiarity and involvement with Korean culture on a daily basis could be a new possible component in deciding one's marital preference. One particular activity I tested is viewership of Korean programming. I hypothesized that television would facilitate cultural transmission; hence I predicted that Group A would have more frequent viewership of Korean television than Group B. The actual data disclosed that there was no significant discrepancy between Group A and Group B in

their viewership of Korean television. Group A did have slightly more people who watched Korean television more frequently than the people from Group B. However, the difference was too subtle for it to be meaningful. During the interviews, I had the opportunity to explore this variable. I asked Annie Kim, a second-generation living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, what Korean television means to her. She answered, "Nothing more than just a form of entertainment." While many people agreed with this position, I was able to record a different perspective from a participant who claimed that he does not watch Korean television at all. Christopher Cho, who lived in the United States since he was 8, gave his opinion:

> Korean television is the reason why I feel so different from my parents. Every night they come home [from work], they watch Korean television. On weekends, that's all they do; from the moment they wake up to the moment they go to sleep. I tried to watch it with them, but I couldn't. I barely understood what was happening on the shows. (I: Would you say this affected your outlook on marriage? If so, how?) Watching my parents being absorbed in Korean television made me want to marry someone who's not Korean. If my wife sat around the house watching Korean television all day, I would be very upset.

Because of the small sample pool, I did not have another participant who shared this belief. I was unable to determine if Christopher was a relative norm or a deviation.

Surveys also revealed that individuals in Group A travelled to South Korea more frequently than the people in Group B. I wanted to know if visiting Korea could affect marital preference. Rachael Min, a second-generation Korean-American who is engaged

to a recent Korean immigrant, reflected upon her experience:

> I was born and raised in the US and my immediate family members are the only ones that are here [in the United States]. So I grew up, not really knowing what it means to have cousins, uncles, or even grandparents. I felt really detached. I understood that I'm Korean because my parents were from Korea, but I didn't really accept myself as a Korean until I visited South Korea for the first time when I was 18. I got to meet my cousins, uncles, aunts, and grandparents. It was so wonderful. That's when I knew and felt that I'm also Korean.

For Rachael, visiting Korea was a milestone in her life. Her family reinforced and strengthened her ethnic identity. When she finally realized and accepted her Korean ethnic identity, she felt "the need to marry another Korean," or someone who was the most similar to her identity.

*Fears of Being an Outsider*

The apprehension of being labeled an outsider was found in both Group A and Group B. For Group A, being an outsider meant marrying interracially or interethnically. Because individuals in Group A often participated in the daily activities of Korean communities – such as Korean grocery shopping and meeting Korean friends – it heightened the importance of marrying a fellow Korean. Jane Park, a second-generation Korean-American, made this point:

> Every time I'm with my [Korean] friends, we like to gossip. Like, so-and-so married a White guy and how that's so troublesome. But that's not just

> me. Whenever I'm at a Korean store, if somebody walks in with a foreign partner or mixed children, everyone will give them the scorch eye and the older ladies will start talking about them as they pass by. I know it's mean, but Koreans don't do well with foreigners. Knowing that, I would do anything to not get that kind of treatment.

In contrast, Group B feared that ethnic endogamy would promote and eventually deepen the self-segregation that many Koreans practice in varying degrees. Annie Kim expressed her concern:

> The biggest reason why I don't want to marry another Korean is because I'm afraid my actions will contribute to the self-isolation Koreans have in the United States. I think mixing [with other ethnicities and races] increases diversity and is therefore healthier. (I: Healthier? What do you mean by that?) Oh, like once you start mixing, you step out of your ethnic minority boundary and become a part of the majority.

The context that brought out the fear differed due to the participants' different ways of labeling an insider from an outsider, but it was noticeable that participants from both groups wanted to be a part of the powerful majority.

*Tradition vs. Love: A Form of Self-expression*

During the interviews, the concepts of tradition and modernity surfaced. Group A often felt proud that they are continuing a tradition that has existed for centuries. Some participants felt that they are preserving the ethnic homogeneity. In addition, they criticized those who preferred ethnic and racial exogamy for being ungrateful and

disrespectful. Hailey Jeong, who married a Korean few years ago, discussed her circumstances:

> Because we are a *danilminjok* (people with homogeneous ethnicity), I think all Koreans are born with the responsibility to continue all things Korean. This includes our pure, 100% Korean blood. You can only do this by marrying another Korean. There is no other way. I also want to add that we shouldn't see this [responsibility] as a burden. We should appreciate that we are the only people in the world to have such a characteristic (translated).

In her survey, Hailey gave love a relatively low score. When I asked the reason for such rating, she clarified:

> I think love is important in marriages. I just don't think you need love initially when choosing a potential marriage partner. My parents arranged our marriage. I didn't really like my husband when I first met him; he wasn't exactly gorgeous. But he was Korean and he had a great job. That's all I needed to know because love can come after the marriage (translated).

On the contrary, Group B stated that love is the utmost important priority in choosing a marriage partner. With love, they felt that they could convince the parents and face other hardships interracial and interethnic marriages can pose. There was an impression that Koreans who choose ethnic and racial exogamy are heroes or individuals willing to fight for their rights. Jackie Kim, who recently got engaged to her longtime Japanese boyfriend, shared her story:

> I won't lie, it was difficult. At times, I felt like giving up. We even considered eloping. Well anyway, in the beginning, it felt like we were the modern-day *Romeo and Juliet*. My parents wanted me to marry a Korean guy and my fiancé's parents wanted him to marry a Japanese. After weeks of persuading, our parents finally gave in. So this version of *Romeo and Juliet* will end happily.

The participants in Group B considered people who follow ethnic endogamy imbeciles who had no opinions for themselves. Jackie remarked about a friend, who chose arranged marriage over his true love. She pointed out, "The worst part of all this is that he never objected. Not even once. He was like a marionette, doing what his parents told him to do."

Sometimes, the resistance to ethnic endogamy gets halted by traditionalists – mainly the parents. Josh Kim, a second-generation Korean-American who ended his 3-year relationship six months ago, confessed his own experience:

> My girlfriend was White and we met in school. We weren't that serious in the beginning. But after 3 years, we started to discuss our future, marriage, having kids. So one day, I told my parents that I want to marry my girlfriend. My mom looked at me in silence and began to cry. After weeping about 10 minutes, she started yelling at me, saying that this marriage cannot happen. I've had [Korean] friends with similar situations but their parents all gave in eventually. So going in, I sort of knew all this was going to happen. The next day, my mom went on a hunger strike. For a couple of days, I just ignored it. I mean, how serious can this get?

> Then about six days later, she collapsed and we took her to the ER. She was discharged the next day. But as soon as she got home, she continued her hunger strike. Long story short, I had to take her to ER two more times and by the last time, I knew this marriage could not happen.

Several other participants shared their stories of parents and family members' tactics in demolishing the participant's desire to marry exogamously. Some mentioned that the parents refused to provide any financial support. One participant mentioned that her parents emptied her room, threw out all her belongings, and tried to rent it to a stranger. This suggests that while some may revolt to marry exogamously, not all attempts are successful.

In all cases, participants seemed to consider love and ethnic endogamy as mutually exclusive categories. Although there have been people who have achieved both in their marriage, some people – especially those in Group B – felt that love implies exogamous marriage. It is possible that since all participants' parents had a strong preference for ethnic endogamy over other forms of marriages, parental views limit participants' sense of independence and freedom.

Both groups felt very strongly about their beliefs and ideology. In Group A, it was about being a responsible Korean. In Group B, it was about protecting their right to love. Although the context was quite different, it is interesting that both groups self-proclaimed themselves as heroes or exemplars for others to follow.

# Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter will apply the findings from the previous chapters and apply it to cultural-level themes. This chapter will consider identity formation in a multicultural society, perception of endogamy, effects of lacking different exogamous marriage terms, and comparison of my thesis to other works.

## *American, Korean, or Both: Issues of Self-identity*

One of the most notable challenges that I encountered during my interviews was the certainty or confusion of identity among my participants. During the fieldwork, I observed some participants who ignored their legal status as an American citizen and claimed their identity based on their heritage. I also spoke with participants who strictly prefer the term "Korean-American" because the term implies that they are legal citizens of the United States. Interestingly, I observed that some of my participants' identity varied depending on situations. For example, some participants supported Korea for some events and the United States for others during the duration of the 2010 Winter Olympics, shifting identity according to which country won more gold medals on a given day. This variation implies that there is no clearly measurable boundary that distinguishes someone as Korean or American. This relates to my research because I noticed that when a person refers to him or herself as Korean, then he or she was more likely to choose ethnic endogamy. On the contrary, if an individual defines him or herself as simply American or Korean-American, they were more accepting of ethnic and racial exogamy.

Many findings discussed in Chapter 5 suggest that personal experiences not only shape marital orientation, but they also construct an ethnic identity. Determinants such as family, community, and time of immigration showed their presence in the identity formation process. The participants who had limited access to Korean communities and culture, learned to adapt to the other culture and way of life. In the case of this research, it was the culture of the White majority in the United States. Some informants, who had successfully assimilated into the majority, showed discomfort with the term, "exogamy." They didn't think interracial and interethnic marriages were exogamy because they were American. This transcended concept of endogamy and exogamy stresses that categorization of endogamy and exogamy cannot be generalized and should be considered on an individual-level.

*International Marriage as an Umbrella Term*

Low ethnic and racial exogamy preference among some Korean immigrants and individuals whose first language is Korean can be explained by the lack in terminology for different types of intermarriages. As mentioned in *Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review*, the Korean language does not distinguish between interracial marriage and interethnic marriage. Instead, the term *Gukje Gyeolhon* (international marriage) is used to collectively refer to different types of intermarriages. Participants who spoke English natively tended to differentiate between interracial and interethnic marriages. However, participants who learned English as a second language often confused the two and used the term interracial marriage to describe both racial and ethnic exogamies. With that said, it is possible that the lack of marriage categorical terms makes the action and

consequences appear much more serious. To a native English speaker, interracial or interethnic marriage may mean when two people from a different race or ethnic background marry. For a native Korean speaker who perceives all forms of intermarriage (interracial, interethnic, interfaith, to name a few) as one big entity, marrying exogamously means crossing every boundary of outmarriages. So, to a native Korean-speaker, any form of exogamy is a more weighty violation of the cultural expectations and norms.

*Love vs. Ethnic Endogamy: When Personal Choice Meets Tradition*

The data revealed a trend where a majority of participants gave reverse ratings (e.g. giving 1 for love and 5 for ethnic endogamy) for love and ethnic endogamy, suggesting that these two factors are not seen as compatible and at times are viewed as mutually exclusive. During the interview, many informants reported difficulty in keeping their relationship with a non-Korean partner from the parents who demanded that he or she marry a Korean. These participants tended to think of love and ethnic endogamy as different entities because what they desired was not what their parents wanted. Since the participants' exogamous relationships were based on love, it appeared that their parents rejected their love and wanted them to engage in ethnic endogamy against their will. This naturally led participants to contrast love and ethnic endogamy because those two are the focus of this tension.

Some participants mentioned that love and ethnic endogamy could co-exist. However, even those participants who thought that the probability of like-minded Koreans meeting and falling in love with each other was low. This argument ties to the

availability of the right spouse. As the Korean population in the United States grows, the marriage pool will also increase for those opting for ethnic endogamy. With more options to choose from, I predict the larger Korean marriage pool will sway people who feel neutral about the issue to ethnic endogamy.

*Love and Financial Success: Can They Coexist?*

The survey data revealed that participants from Group B thought love and financial/occupational success of a partner were highly important in choosing a marriage partner. It is commonly believed that marrying out of love and marrying for money are contradictory ideas. So why did participants from Group B considered them equally important? This could be related to the socioeconomic status of my participants. Participants like Claire from Chapter 5 suggest that people want to marry someone with a similar socioeconomic and educational background. Participants who shared this view often noted that they had desire to marry someone in the similar field of occupation, which would facilitate communication and understanding of each other. Given that 30 people from Group B had attended graduate/professional schools and held prestigious positions in society, it could be deduced that they wanted to marry someone of equal education or occupational status, rather than marrying someone from a higher financial status.

*Ethnic Endogamy as Culturally Arranged Marriage*

From an outsider's perspective, ethnic endogamy may appear to be the easiest form of marriage among minorities. However, the data presented in this thesis suggest

otherwise. Individuals forgo their voice and independence completely while others struggle to win parents' approval with varying outcomes. The complexity of observations reported on participants prioritizing ethnicity over love when choosing a potential marriage partner indicates the need for additional research. The modern Korean notion of marriage emphasizes love as an important component (Bae 202). My research revealed that love was a relatively important factor in marriage even among the participants who favored ethnic endogamy.

Yet, people continue to place considerable emphasis on marrying another Korean. The reason why many people opt for ethnic endogamy is to preserve pure Korean heritage. Korea exhibits a rare case of ethnic homogeneity, even in this increasingly global society. This homogeneity has brought Koreans a sense of dignity and the right to self-glorify. It presents a duty for Koreans: maintaining it. In that sense, Koreans who want to respect the tradition have no choice but to be bound by the culturally arranged marriage. Among those whose ethnic identity is weakly Korean or not Korean at all, the ethnic homogeneity is not something to be admired; it is an onus. Therefore, they rebel against the expectations.

*Implications of Patriarchal and Patrilineal Families*

A majority of the participants reported that they had grown up in a patriarchal family system. Since the patriarchal system grants all authorities to the eldest male in a household, more women disapproved of the system. The female participants from Group B reported a strong consensus that patriarchal authority was a factor that attributed them to prefer ethnic and racial exogamy. They often compared such unequal distribution of

power to egalitarian family structures. Among the females in Group A, participants expressed different views and opinions of patriarchy. While some accepted it as part of Korean culture, others showed a desire and willingness to destroy this system in their own family. The latter group explained that inequality between genders is an old tradition that is quickly disappearing. So, they were determined to discontinue such a practice even if their future husbands bear such qualities. In contrast to the female participants, men from both groups did not really have a strong opinion regarding the patriarchal system. Although some participants showed interest in continuing patriarchy, no individual responded that it should be stopped.

Female participants continued to express their discontent with Korean family dynamics when the topic of patrilineage surfaced. Because males are expected to carry on the family name, wealth, and property, it was crucial for a traditional Korean family to have a son. Many women disapproved of the idea that only a male can be the rightful heir. Most participants who had a brother said that they have experienced differences in treatment, because the brother is always given the spotlight. One informant in particular said that her mother gave birth six times before she finally had a son. She recalled that once her mother had a son, her father and grandparents treated her with much more respect. Moreover, her brother received much more attention and care than her other siblings, simply because he was a son. Some stated that this gender inequality led them to choose exogamy because if they had a daughter in the future, they did not want her to be a part of what they had to endure.

*Danilminjok as Culturally Constructed Notion*

*Danilminjok*, or people with homogeneous ethnicity, was a term that frequently came up during my interviews. Many interviewees shared their pride of being a *danilminjok*. Many held the notion of "100% Korean blood," that Korea's ethnic homogeneity is something that has been maintained biologically. However, it should be noted that because race and ethnicity are socially constructed categories, there is no biological basis behind ethnic homogeneity. Therefore, the concept of *danilminjok* is purely cultural.

Koreans continue to believe that ethnic homogeneity is biological due to the Korean government's education policy. In South Korea, the ministry of education controls the content and publication of all textbooks for secondary schools. The government uses this platform to teach students about Korea's ethnic homogeneity. Courses named "moral" are specifically designed to teach students about cultural expectations, norms, and traditions. From elementary school to high school, Korean students are required to take a moral course each year. When I attended school in South Korea, I remember my teachers telling me to be proud of our "pure blood." Simultaneously, they used the United States as an example of a country that is "mixed." My teachers heavily emphasized the importance of blood, a symbol of genetic material. Perhaps it is this strict 12-year education regimen that makes it hard for Korean citizens to accept nothing but ethnic endogamy. In any case, it can be said that *danilminjok* is a culturally constructed idea that needs to be sustained through pedagogy.

*Comparison to Other Works: Similarities and Differences*

While many assimilationists argue that the need to become a majority is the driving force in all exogamy, it was discovered that there were other hidden motives – such as family structure and time of immigration – that did not surface until the interviews were conducted. It should be noted that there were cases where assimilation appeared to be the final goal of interracial marriages. These incidences were observed when the Korean population in a given area was too small, leaving the individual with no choice but to get acquainted with the majority. Some attributed institutions like school as an agent of assimilation. It was believed that frequent interactions and exposure to non-Koreans facilitated the assimilation process. Overall, it was evident that integration was no longer a big motivation for minorities engaging in racial exogamy.

Other works have found that female Asian-Americans tend to marry out in a higher rate than the males. A similar observation was made in this research. 76 percent of the female participants favored ethnic or racial exogamy over ethnic endogamy (see Table 1). During the interviews, it was brought to light that the patriarchal family structure among some Korean families was the main factor that discouraged Korean women from entering ethnic endogamy. In addition, the patrilineal descent system that many Korean families practice also puts less pressure on the daughters to marry Koreans.

Nativity and generational number were also factors that other researchers have previously explored. During the interviews, it was revealed that majority of Group A's participants had resided in the United States for a shorter period of time than that of Group B. In fact, many participants from Group B were U.S.-born American citizens.

Among the foreign-born participants in Group B, many stated that they moved to the Untied States when they were fairly young.

This study set out to find how personal lifestyle and activities could affect marital preference among Koreans. In terms of the data, the small sample prevented critical analysis of the survey data and it ultimately did not make a significant contribution. However, the interview data revealed that traveling experience in particular played a rather crucial role in the ethnic identity formation process.

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

*What Does Marriage Mean?*

Commonly, marriage would be defined as a social contract that ties two people together. The definition may develop further by adding small details (e.g. right to share property and right to sexual access). However, as evidenced by the data presented in this thesis, defining marriage is not simple. In the context of Koreans living in the United States, two types of marriages are of interest: ethnic endogamy and ethnic or racial exogamy. These two forms are often compared because the focal point in any Korean marriage is whether the groom or the bride married another Korean.

Because of its nature, Korean marriage is often indicative of cultural traditions, norms, and expectations. It may also reveal outside pressures that may affect the transmission of culture. In addition, marriage also reflects importance within Korean culture. For instance, emphasis on ethnic endogamy among Koreans supports the belief that ethnic homogeneity is considered valuable within Korean culture. Marital choices even describe the process of social identity formation.

However, marital preferences only provide half of the answers. Marriages reflect the choices an individual made, but they do not tell the stories behind each choice. As a result, this thesis attempted to identify the factors that have significant influence in one's marriage choice by conducting in-depth interviews. One important factor that I distinguished is gender. Because of patriarchal and patrilineal traditions, female participants were less willing to marry endogamously. Many of them had experienced it personally and were against continuing a tradition that promotes gender inequality. In

contrast, male participants generally remained neutral on this issue. Although no individual explicitly stated that patriarchal authority is the reason why they prefer ethnic endogamy, many understood the power relations within a patriarchal family and did not refuse to practice this system.

Immigration history and pattern were important factors that influenced marriage preference. It was discovered that second and higher generation individuals were more likely to be accepting of interethnic and interracial marriages. Among the foreign-born participants, the age at the time of immigration played a crucial role. If the individual entered the United States at an early age, they were more likely to have frequent exposures to the mainstream culture through institutions like school. This regular interaction facilitates the assimilation process and even re-shaping on identity. It was also noted that people living in a city with large Korean population tended to favor ethnic endogamy. Large Korean population not only masks the minority ethnic status, it increases the marriage pool.

Both groups reported apprehension towards becoming an outsider as one reason for their preferences. For those who chose ethnic endogamy, they were afraid that by marrying a non-Korean, they would be rejected from the Korean community of which they are a part. On the other hand, the advocates of ethnic and racial exogamy felt that ethnic endogamy functions as a tool to deepen the ethnic boundary in the United States. They feared marrying a Korean individual would lead to limited connections to the majority.

Although the attempt to evaluate the influence of lifestyle and daily activities on marriage decisions was rather inconclusive, one variable – frequent travels to South

Korea – stood out from the rest. It was found that people who travelled to South Korea frequently were likely to choose ethnic endogamy. Participants who travelled to South Korea regularly knew what it felt like to be a Korean citizen. By living among native Koreans, many felt strong connections to the history and the culture. As a result, these participants deeply respected Korean cultural norms and expectations.

The data suggested that the participants categorize love and ethnic endogamy as separate entities. It was discovered that participants who prefer ethnic and racial exogamy contrasted the two based on their personal experiences. As they protected their love from parents who tried to enforce ethnic endogamy upon them, they noticed that it was their love and their parents' wishes to marry endogamously that were creating the tension. As a result, they naturally concluded that two factors are oppositional.

There were discrepancies in how my participants identified themselves. Some call themselves "Korean" although their citizenship was in the United States. Others considered themselves "American" because they felt closest to American culture. The latter group showed discomfort in calling ethnic or racial exogamy as "outmarriage" because they perceived their marriage as one American marrying another American. It was ultimately discovered that variables that influence marital preference also play an important role in the identity formation process.

The notion of ethnic homogeneity was also discussed. My participants often used the phrase "pure Korean blood" to denote Korea's treasured ethnic homogeneous status. Since ethnicity and race are socially constructed concepts, there is no such thing is ethnic homogeneity. Yet, Koreans continue to define it as something that is biological largely due to the government's education policy. This phenomenon explained how a society

and its government struggle to maintain and instill a socially constructed concept to its citizens.

From Claire, who married a non-Korean doctor, to Rachael, who married a recent Korean immigrant, there is a common presence that exists in all the marriages observed: similarities. For some, it is about continuing Korean homogeneity, for others, it is about love and personal choice. It is important to note that in any marriage and relationship, individuals choose their partners based on how similar they are in terms of beliefs and interests.

*Drawbacks and Possible Improvements*

To produce valid and reliable data, it is advisable to adopt more than one method. In my attempt to approach this topic more holistically, I implemented both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interview) methods in this research. There were some improvements that could have been made to my research methods. For example, using a larger number of samples for the survey would have provided data more reflective of the population.

Although participant recruitment was done as randomly as possible, it was difficult to find possible candidates for the research in cities where I had no connections. As a result, in some locations, I had to recruit people through friends and acquaintances. Since people who belong to the same social group often are likely to share similar beliefs and ideologies, the sample may have not been completely arbitrary. However, whenever these incidents occurred, I tried to limit recruitment to a small number to ensure mutual exclusivity. Despite the efforts, some data revealed that the sample might not be as

random as it should have been. For instance, more than half of Group B had an educational background of graduate/professional school. This resulted from the snowball sampling method. Many of my friends and acquaintances who assisted me in the recruitment process were all physicians and lawyers. Naturally, they recruited people from their social network, whom they met through work or school. If I conduct similar research in the future, I will redesign the recruitment process to ensure that the sample is random and representative of the population.

Another possible drawback of this research is my position as an insider-researcher. In other words, it is possible that because I am a Korean, I may have overlooked factors that I deem as not specific, but may actually be something of interest among the outsiders. However, I have tried to reduce room for such error by closely working with my thesis advisor and committee members, who provided the outsider's perspective to my findings. In addition, I cannot conclude that my status as an insider was a mistake, because it also led me to build easy rapport with my participants. Because of my ethnicity, they easily shared intimate stories that they might be hesitant to discuss with a non-Korean.

*Future Projects*

The factors that have been identified in this thesis only represent the beginning of research on this topic. Future research could explore other variables that have not been studied in this thesis. Another possible topic for future research is the Korean family structure and relationship in the United States. Is patriarchy maintained? How do family members react to the majority, the American egalitarian family structure? How does this

impact each family member?

One important variable that was not measured in this thesis was the parents' opinions. Although the participants shared stories of their parents and family members, I never interviewed any parent directly. Similarly, I did not include the identity of families of exogamy. By including these two groups as participants in a similar research, we might be able to discover new findings and implications of which we are unaware.

With the high influx of foreigners entering South Korea, it would be interesting to study the demographics of South Korea, as it slowly becomes a multicultural society. Some possible topics to focus on include how people adapt to the changes and how such change is reflected on international marriage rates. Another dimension to focus on is changes in governmental policies. How will the Korean government cope with its changing society? Will they continue to teach the *danilminjok* idea or will they accept and embrace diversity?

There is an increasingly popular argument that emphasizes the importance of studying ethnic minorities separately due to varying immigration histories in the United States. Yet, there is a significant lack in literature regarding Korean-Americans. It is my sincerest hope that my work will familiarize those in academia with Korean-American practices and to encourage future research.

## Notes

1. I have replaced all of my participants' names with pseudonyms for privacy purposes. The names have been chosen arbitrarily and bear no resemblance of the individual's actual name or appearance.

2. Percentage values presented in Table 1, 2, and 3 may not total exactly hundred due to issues of rounding in calculation.

# Appendices

Appendix A: Table 1B. Demographical Analysis by Gender

**Table 1B. Demographical Analysis by Gender**

| | Group A | | | | Group B | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| *Group Size* | 35 | 100 | 12 | 100 | 15 | 100 | 38 | 100 |
| *Marital status* | | | | | | | | |
| Single | 19 | 54 | 4 | 33 | 5 | 33 | 5 | 13 |
| In a relationship /engaged | 13 | 37 | 6 | 50 | 8 | 53 | 27 | 71 |
| Married | 3 | 9 | 2 | 17 | 2 | 13 | 6 | 16 |
| *Education level* | | | | | | | | |
| College | 28 | 80 | 12 | 100 | 6 | 40 | 17 | 45 |
| Graduate /professional school | 7 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 60 | 21 | 55 |
| *Years of residence* | | | | | | | | |
| Less than 1 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1 ~ 4 | 6 | 17 | 2 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 5 ~ 9 | 12 | 34 | 6 | 50 | 3 | 20 | 7 | 18 |
| 10 or more | 15 | 43 | 4 | 33 | 12 | 80 | 31 | 82 |
| *Interest in settling permanently* | | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 9 | 26 | 4 | 33 | 14 | 93 | 36 | 95 |
| No | 12 | 34 | 7 | 58 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Unsure | 14 | 40 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 7 | 2 | 5 |
| *Experience with dating non-Korean* | | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 23 | 66 | 11 | 92 | 14 | 93 | 32 | 84 |
| No | 13 | 37 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 7 | 6 | 16 |

Appendix B: Evaluation of Priorities in Choosing Marriage Partners by Gender

**Table 2B. Evaluation of Priorities in Choosing Marriage Partners Using Five-level Likert item by Gender**

| | Group A | | | | Group B | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| *Group Size* | 35 | 100 | 12 | 100 | 15 | 100 | 38 | 100 |
| *Love* | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 42 | 13 | 87 | 34 | 89 |
| 2 | 6 | 17 | 4 | 33 | 2 | 13 | 4 | 11 |
| 3 | 20 | 57 | 1 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | 9 | 26 | 2 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *Ethnic and racial endogamy* | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 30 | 86 | 3 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 5 | 14 | 4 | 33 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 3 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 42 | 3 | 20 | 11 | 29 |
| 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 20 | 12 | 32 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 53 | 24 | 63 |
| *Religious endogamy* | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 6 | 17 | 6 | 50 | 1 | 7 | 3 | 8 |
| 2 | 14 | 40 | 4 | 33 | 3 | 20 | 3 | 8 |
| 3 | 12 | 34 | 2 | 17 | 5 | 33 | 14 | 37 |
| 4 | 3 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 40 | 17 | 45 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| *Approval of parents* | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 18 | 51 | 2 | 17 | 3 | 20 | 2 | 5 |
| 2 | 8 | 23 | 8 | 67 | 2 | 13 | 9 | 24 |
| 3 | 7 | 20 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 20 | 11 | 29 |
| 4 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 40 | 15 | 39 |
| 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 3 |
| *Financial/occupational success of the partner* | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 33 | 5 | 33 | 12 | 32 |
| 2 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 33 | 3 | 20 | 16 | 42 |
| 3 | 9 | 26 | 4 | 33 | 6 | 40 | 4 | 11 |
| 4 | 23 | 66 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 11 |
| 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 |

* 1 = very important; 2 = important; 3 = fairly important; 4 = not important; 5 = not important at all

Appendix C: Survey Questions

I. Personal information

1. What is your gender? Male Female

2. Where were you born? In United States In South Korea Other

If you answered *Other*, please explain: _____

3. How long have you resided in the United States?

Less than 1 year 1 ~ 4 years 5 ~ 9 years 10 years or more

4. What city and state do you currently reside? _____

5. List the languages you speak and the fluency (where 5 is the proficiency of a native and 1 is the elementary proficiency) in each:

| Language | Level of fluency | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| _____ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7. What is your occupation? Retail/Business Health-related fields

Legal profession Education Other:_____

8. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High School College Graduate school Other

If you answered *Other*, please explain: _____

9. Do you plan on settling permanently in the United States? Yes No Unsure

II. Marital information

1. What is your marital status?

Single (not in a relationship) Single (In a relationship or engaged)

Married Divorced

2a. If you answered *Single (not in a relationship)* to Question 1, what is your preference on your future marriage partner's ethnic identity/race?

Korean Non-Korean No preference

2b. If you answered *Single (in a relationship or engaged)* to Question 1, what is your partner's ethnic identity/race?

Korean Non-Korean No preference

2b. If you answered *Married* to Question 1, is your spouse Korean/Korean-American?

Yes No

If you answered *No*, what is your spouse's ethnic identity/race? _____

2c. If you answered *Divorced*, was your spouse Korean/Korean-American?

Yes No

If you answered *No*, what was your spouse's ethnic identity/race? _____

3. Have you ever dated a non-Korean? Yes No

4. In relation to choosing marriage partners, indicate how important each of the following criteria are in your priorities. Rate each criterion using a scale of 1 ~ 5, where:

**1 is VERY IMPORTANT**
**2 is IMPORTANT**
**3 is FAIRLY IMPORTANT**
**4 is NOT VERY IMPORTANT**
**5 is NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL**

___ Love
___ Marrying within my own ethnic group (Korean) / race (Asian)
___ Marrying within my own religion
___ Approval of parents of the marriage
___ Financial and occupational success of partner

III. Miscellaneous

1. In your pastime, do you watch Korean television? Yes No

If you answered *Yes*, how many hours on average do you spend watching Korean television in a week?

Less than one hour  1 ~ 4 hours  5 ~ 9 hours  More than 10 hours

2. Do you attend a Korean church?  Yes  No

3. How often do you visit Korea?

Less than once a year  Once a year  Twice a year  More than twice a year

4. When was the last time you visited Korea?

Less than six months ago  One year ago  More than one year ago

5. Do your parents permanently reside in the United States?  Yes  No

If answered *Yes*, do you currently live with your parents in the same household?

Yes  No

6. How many hours on average do you talk to your parents in a week?

Less than one hour  1 ~ 4 hours  5 ~ 9 hours  More than 10 hours

7. Do you currently live in or near a city that has a large Korean population (more than 10,000 people)?  Yes  No

8. Do you know of any family member that married a non-Korean?  Yes  No

IV. Recruitment for Interviews

Based on your answers, we are recruiting participants who can be interviewed regarding marriage among Koreans in the United States. If you agree to participate in this research, we will interview you in a semi-structured fashion for about two hours at your residence or at a mutually agreed upon location. If a personal meeting cannot be established, then a phone interview will take place instead.

If you are willing to participate further in this research, please indicate your interest below and leave your contact information where you can be easily reached:

□ Yes, I am willing to be interviewed and here is my contact information: _____

□ No, I do not want to be interviewed or contacted further regarding this research.

Appendix D. Interview Questions

Role of parents and family

- Which type of marriage do you parents prefer?
- Has your parents every discussed their preference in your (future) marriage partner?
- Has your friends and other family members discussed their preference in (future) your marriage partner?
- Describe the family you grew up with
- Egalitarian vs. totalitarian

Personal

- Who do you hang out with (in terms of race and ethnicity)?
- Describe the neighborhood you grew up in
- What kind of Korean-related activities do you do regularly?
- What does it mean to be a Korean?
- Do you feel like an minority in your workplace? School? Neighborhood?
- Thoughts on bi-racial or mixed-race children
- Which language do you speak at home?
- Where did you learn English?
- When you are with non-Koreans, do you feel like you are a different person than you are when with Koreans?
- What changed after marriage? Advantages and Disadvantages?

Love and Tradition

- Culturally arranged marriage
- Do you think marriage is personal choice/preference or an obligation?
- Decision to marry vs. decision to date
- Do you think love and tradition can coexist?

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