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Signature:

Eunbee Ham

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Name

Date

Narrative Identities of Third Culture Kids:
Pastoral Theological Reflections on Identity in an Interstitial Cultural Milieu

By

Eunbee Ham
Doctor of Theology in Pastoral Counseling

Candler School of Theology

Dr. Emmanuel Y. Lartey
Committee Chair

Dr. Karen Scheib
Committee Member

Dr. Melinda McGarrah Sharp
Committee Member

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Eunbee Ham
B.A., Calvin College, 2005
M.A., M.Div, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2009

Dissertation Committee Chair: Emmanuel Lartey, Ph.D.

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Abstract

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By Eunbee Ham

This study explores the experiences of minoritized Third Culture Kids (TCKs). TCKs are defined as persons whose developmental years before the age of 18 are marked by frequent experiences of international relocations, resulting in complex and prolonged processes of negotiating identity and belonging. Inviting three Korean TCK women to tell their own life stories, this narrative inquiry explores how they pull together the disparate pieces of their life experiences into meaningful narrative identities. Since current TCK literature tends to be Eurocentric and rarely addresses the influence of race, class, gender, or religion in TCKs' identity formation, this study privileges the voices of Korean TCK Christian women. Analyzing their stories through postcolonial, psychological, and pastoral theological perspectives, the study illuminates how their grief, defense mechanisms, depression, low self-esteem, or overcompensating behaviors intertwine with the hidden narratives of colonialism, racism, classism, sexism, and Christianity. The project ultimately disrupts the Eurocentric underpinnings of TCK research and pioneers pastoral theological reflection and strategies of care through the lenses of Korean TCKs.

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Dedicated to my parents

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Introduction

This research stems from the desire to help empower minoritized¹ children and youth who have grown up in multiple cultures to construct meaningful and whole identities. Specifically, this study focuses on the experiences of minoritized Third Culture Kids, or TCKs. TCK is a term describing persons whose developmental years before the age of 18 are marked by frequent experiences of international relocations, resulting in complex and prolonged processes of negotiating identity and belonging. In fact, Barack Obama is a high profile TCK who wrote about his struggles growing up as a TCK. His mother was a woman from Kansas and his father was a black man from Kenya. Obama grew up in Hawaii for six years and spent four years in Indonesia with his stepfather before returning to Hawaii. Later in life, he went to Kenya to retrace his roots and try to make some sense of his life of navigating in between cultures from a young age. In his memoir, *Dreams From My Father*, Obama describes that he was caught in “[...] the constant crippling fear that I didn’t belong somehow, that unless I dodged and hid and pretended to be something I wasn’t I would forever remain an outsider, with the rest of the world, black and white, always standing in judgment.”²

Obama’s struggles resonate with me and my life experiences as a minoritized TCK. I spent eight years in Korea, nine years in the Philippines, and now almost twenty years in the U.S. I also spent several formative months in Mexico, Honduras, Brazil, South Africa, and Mozambique. While it was in many ways a privilege to be exposed to many different cultures from a young age, it was also traumatic to feel like I could never belong anywhere or claim a nationality. Since I looked

¹ I’m choosing to use the word *minoritized* instead of minority to highlight the exercise of power behind social constructs that assign certain groups to majority and minority status. Replacing “minority” with “minoritized” has become more of a norm among scholars who wish to show that no one is born a “minority” but rather socially or structurally forced to the margins with less access to visibility, voice, or power. Therefore, the verb form *minoritize* portrays more accurately the processes of identity construction rather than a noun describing nature or reality. See Michael Benitez Jr., "Resituating Culture Centers within a Social Justice Framework," in *Culture Centers in Higher Education: Perspectives on Identity, Theory, and Practice* (2010), 119-34.

² Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 111.

Korean, Koreans would expect that I act and behave Korean, and I could act the part up to a certain point, but I would inevitably end up deviating in certain ways, jarring their expectations and cultural norms. In the Philippines, I was perceived as one of the wealthy Chinese elite or despised as one who represented Japanese colonial oppression. In the U.S., I was a non-identity. Between the racial binary of white and black people, I tried my best to excel and fit in with the white people, who, in turn kept asking, “Where are you from? Your English is so good!” I was both exoticized and treated as a perpetual foreigner. It took me years of graduate education, spiritual practices, CPE, therapy, and training as a pastoral counselor, to experience some healing as I cultivated a deeper awareness and analysis of the narratives that were damaging to my sense of self. These understandings helped me deconstruct much of the internalized self-hatred and shame to construct a more meaningful and compassionate narrative identity.

I realize that I am in a position of enormous privilege to have had the education and resources to work through these narratives of shame or self-hatred. What about minoritized children and youth who find themselves in between cultures without the language to name their experiences or the platform to let their stories be heard? Must they also go through a decade of higher education and therapy to piece together some semblance of an identity they can proudly proclaim? Adults might think that children tend to adjust and adapt quickly, and in a sense, they do. But at what cost? The pain and isolation still come through in Obama’s question. “Who could help explain this gash in our hearts? [...] I had no guide that might show me how to join this troubled world.”³ My research therefore stems from a desire to create pastoral resources for children and youth who may be asking similar questions about their identity and belonging in an increasingly mobile and globalized world. My aim is to provide the language and tools to help empower young people to become more fluent

³ Ibid., 118, 21.

in analyzing their narrative environments⁴ so that they can see themselves more as agents and authors of their own stories. Pastoral theology can offer a valuable interpretive lens for understanding identity because religious narratives can profoundly impact the way we view ourselves, our purpose, sense of belonging, and future direction.⁵ This is why I believe that an exploration of creative and constructive pastoral theological responses to TCKs' struggles in identity formation will be a timely and vital asset to the field of pastoral theology.

Dissertation Overview

Chapter 1 is an overview of TCK literature that criticizes its Eurocentric focus and lack of power analysis. Then I briefly review human developmental theories in relation to TCK identity formation processes and the significance of narrative identity as a central concept and tool in this study. Reviewing theological literature on identity and pastoral theological literature on TCKs, I explain how narrative and postcolonial pastoral theological approaches can help increase contextual clarity and care in both moments of understanding and misunderstanding.

Chapter 2 discusses the research methodology and research method used to conduct this study. I discuss the reasons for using a qualitative narrative inquiry method to interview three Korean, young adult Christian TCK women. I share my qualitative data collection and analysis processes, which were characterized by collaboration and co-participation with the researcher and interview participants.

⁴ In *Reading Our Lives: The Poetics of Growing Old*, Randall and McKim describe that *narrative environments* consist of larger webs and layers of stories that shape and are shaped by personal stories. For instance, stories of family, culture, religion, or gender constitute the larger stories that shape and inform personal stories, even as they are impacted by the individuals and communal stories that shape the larger stories. See William L. Randall and Elizabeth McKim, *Reading Our Lives: The Poetics of Growing Old* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 49-57.

⁵ Karen D. Scheib, *Pastoral Care: Telling the Stories of Our Lives* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 136.

Chapter 3 lays out the life stories shared by the interview participants. Each participant told their life stories as if it were a novel or a book, and this chapter lays out how they organized their life stories before analyzing them in the coming chapters. At the end of the chapter, I lift up common themes that the TCKs shared that were the greatest stressors as well as the role of faith as the greatest stabilizing factor in their identity development.

Chapter 4 focuses on analyzing their stories in relation to race and class. I integrate Third World studies, postcolonial theories, and interviewees' own interpretations of race and class to explain how important it is to understand issues of power that shape minoritized TCKs' self-understanding and mental health.

Chapter 5 delves into the impact of gender in the TCK participants' identity formation. I compare themes of gender in Korean folklore, Bible stories, and the TCK women's life stories to demonstrate how these stories can perpetuate sexism and restrict their flourishing. By naming these oppressive plots and themes, I model how minoritized TCKs can begin to resist and deconstruct oppressive gender narratives in faith and society.

Chapter 6 focuses on the women's stories of their faith, which played the most stabilizing, affirming role in their unpredictable childhood and youth. All three participants named faith as the one thing that held the fragmented parts of their identities together, so this chapter explores how faith facilitated their identity formation or undermined it in some cases.

Chapter 7 explores TCK women's own theological reflections as sources for pastoral care practices with minoritized TCKs. Since the scriptures were so integral to their faith and identities, I describe biblical themes of home, displacement, and faith. Giving examples of biblical narratives of call that shaped their narrative identities, I raise awareness about the ambiguous losses that get silenced by biblical call narratives. As an alternative to the silencing of loss and grief in prominent call narratives, I use Walter Brueggemann's hermeneutical approach to the Psalms as a way to give

voice to a wide range of human experiences and emotions as part of finding home in faith. I offer a pastoral theology of home as a holding environment for minoritized TCKs' identity formation.

Chapter 8 concludes by reviewing the study, sharing its limitations and implications for future research. It also shares the interviewees' advice and wisdom for minoritized TCK children and youth as well as those who practice pastoral care with TCKs.

Chapter 1

Defining the Conversation

TCK Literature

The term Third Culture Kids, or TCK was first coined in the 1950s by North American sociologists, John and Ruth Hill Useem. While conducting an ethnographic research on American expatriates living in India, they observed that the expatriate communities created and shared a third cultural space that emerged in between their home cultures and host culture.⁶ The Useems called it an “interstitial culture, the third culture, which is created, shared, and carried by persons who are relating societies, to each other.”⁷ The Useems designated the term “Third Culture Kids” to refer to the children of expatriates growing up in that third cultural space.

While the Useem’s work on TCKs was groundbreaking in naming the unique developmental experiences of internationally mobile youth, it reflected the experiences of white North American and European children of expatriates as representative of all TCKs. Ruth H. Useem fails to acknowledge how power relations and constructs of race, ethnicity, class, or gender interact and shape that third culture space or persons:

[...] the broad outlines of all of these third cultures were more alike than the various “native” cultures in which they were situated. The non-Western cultures gave local color, embellishments, artifacts, additional languages and uniqueness to those coming from the West—but altogether these various third cultures formed an ecumenical bridge between East and West.⁸

Her description of “third culture” sweeps over vast power differentials as she describes what would most likely be perceived as cultural appropriation today for thinking that non-Western cultures give

⁶ John Useem, Ruth H. Useem, and John Donoghue, "Men in the Middle of the Third Culture: The Roles of American and Non-Western People in Cross-Cultural Administration," *Human organization* 22, no. 3 (1963): 169.

⁷ Ruth H. Useem and Richard D. Downie, "Third-Culture Kids," *Today's Education* 65, no. 3 (1976): 103.

⁸ Ruth H. Useem, *Cultural Challenges to Education: The Influence of Cultural Factors in School Learning* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1973), 122.

“color, embellishments, artifacts” to an otherwise seamlessly ecumenical space. Such lack of attention to history and power differences behind the “color, embellishments, artifacts” pervades TCK research, naming more similarities than differences without delving into their *narrative environments*⁹--namely, the larger, dominant socio-cultural, national, historical, institutional, religious, familial narratives that impact identity formation.

Nonetheless, Useem’s work laid the foundation for TCK research. Other researchers have built on their work and suggested alternate names for TCKs. One of the most prominent interchangeable terms for TCK is *global nomads*, coined by Norma McCaig.¹⁰ The reason why I did not choose to use this term in my own research is because the word *global* implies a much wider meaning that is different from the ambiguous, “in-between” space indicated by *third culture*. A person’s experience of multiple countries does not immediately translate into a *global* experience, which is the reason why I prefer Third Culture Kids. Also, the word *nomad* implies a continual roaming, which might further exacerbate a sense of non-belonging and rootlessness widely reported as sources of pain in TCK research.¹¹ I also appreciated the ambiguity and rich possibilities in the term “Third” culture when interpreted through a postcolonial lens. Homi Bhabha’s concept of “Third Space” defies binaries and stretches the boundaries of culture and identity. For example, a label like Korean American captures only a fraction of the formative experiences of certain TCKs.

In 1999, sociologist David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken popularized the term *TCK* through their groundbreaking book, *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*. For the first time, the TCK

⁹ Randall and McKim, *Reading Our Lives: The Poetics of Growing Old*, 50.

¹⁰ Norma McCaig, "Understanding Global Nomads," in *Strangers at Home: Essays on the Effects of Living Overseas and Coming "Home" to a Strange Land* (Bayside, NY: Aletheia, 1996), 99.

¹¹ For studies on TCKs’ struggles with non-belonging and rootlessness, see Raquel C. Hoerstring and Sharon Rae Jenkins, "No Place to Call Home: Cultural Homelessness, Self-Esteem and Cross-Cultural Identities," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 35, no. 1 (2011): 19; David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing up among Worlds*, Revised edition.. ed. (Boston: Nicholas Brealey Pub., 2009), 123-31; Barbara F. Schaetti, “Global Nomad Identity: Hypothesizing a Developmental Model” (PhD Dissertation, The Graduate College of The Union Institute, 2001), 87.

phenomenon was made accessible to the public in a non-scholarly format, featuring the experiences of TCKs in their own words and articulating the benefits and challenges of an internationally mobile childhood. The term has become accessible for many expatriate communities and TCKs around the world who now had a name for their ambiguous cultural identities and experiences. The accessibility of this term makes it valuable because using scholarly terms, like, “interstitial integrity,” “diasporic imagination,” “hybridity,” or “transnational” may not be as accessible for children and youth. I also think there is something important about reserving a name for this group of children and youth and focusing uniquely on their experiences as worthy of a name and research.

Pollock and Van Reken’s definition of TCK has become standard in TCK literature. They define the TCK as

A person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.¹²

This definition has a few shortcomings. Pollock and Van Reken assume that the parents’ culture is singular and does not make room for interracial or transnational marriages. The phrase, “The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, *while not having full ownership in any*,” [italics mine] is also problematic because the decision to have or not to have full ownership of any of the culture(s) should be given to TCKs to negotiate for themselves rather than dictated as the reality for all TCKs. So here I offer my definition: *A TCK is a person whose developmental years from age 0 to 18 are marked by experiences of frequent international relocations, resulting in prolonged and complex processes of negotiating identity and sense of belonging.*

¹² Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing up among Worlds*, 13.

TCKs, especially minoritized TCKs, are underrepresented in studies in psychology and pastoral theology. A possible reason for this neglect might be the notion that there just aren't very many people with the identity formation experiences of TCKs. However, the world is becoming increasingly mobile and globalized, and people are relocating internationally for research, education, work, and immigration, to name a few. TCKs are all around us, but the children and youth tend to get overlooked because, since they are still developing the emotional and cognitive resources to cope with the changes, they are less likely to articulate what is going on. Because most children seem to adapt quickly to their new environments, they might seem like they are well-adjusted and even thriving, but their thriving may come at an unseen cost. One of my research participants, who graduated from two Ivy League institutions, gave me a haunting metaphor of her inner struggles:

Well, I felt like my house is totally shit. May be outside it looks a little bit more presentable, but inside all the wooden boards are rotten and there's sewage coming up from under the floor boards, and I have a lot of things that I need to work on. So I felt ashamed, embarrassed, inadequate. Inadequate is the word that keeps coming up in my life.¹³

Other participants echoed similar themes, in that their depression or anxiety did not get expressed like typical symptoms in the DSM V. Could it be that TCKs' needs get overlooked because they do not present distress in a textbook manner?

My research privileges minoritized TCKs' experiences since much of the existing TCK literature reflects the experiences of White North American and European TCKs. Even if studies include participants of color, they universalize study findings without attending closely to the intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, class, or religion in identity formation. These studies generally point out the challenges and strengths shared by TCKs as the result of their internationally mobile

¹³ Eirene, Interview by author, October 26, 2016.

lifestyle.¹⁴ Challenges include identity confusion, feelings of non-belonging and marginalization, rootlessness, unresolved grief, and difficulty with attachment after repeated losses. The benefits and strengths of TCK experiences tend to be cultural competence, open-mindedness, adaptability, linguistic giftedness, independence, and greater empathy.

Few researchers mention future implications for studies attending to power relations but stop short of actually doing such analyses. For instance, Schaetti (2001) states in her dissertation, “To date no research directly addresses issues of power and cultural dominance in international microcultures, nor the impact of such on the global nomad experience” but does not address power issues herself.¹⁵ Wurgaft’s (2006) dissertation suggests that future studies should examine the role of race in culturally hybrid identity formation, but she leaves the task to others.¹⁶ Walters and Auton-Cuff’s (2009) study on identity formation among TCK women comes close to contextually examining the interplay of gender and third culture in identity formation. Some of the study findings indicated that TCK women often felt their voices silenced during their adolescence and that they often suppressed their emotions in order to adapt to many different cultures.¹⁷ Moreover, Walters and Auton-Cuff reported that spirituality was a source of stability for the women.¹⁸ The study,

¹⁴ See Janet M. Bennett, "Cultural Marginality: Identity Issues in Global Leadership Training," in *Advances in Global Leadership*, ed. Joyce S. Osland, Ming Li, and Ying Wang (Emerald Group Publishing Limited: 2014), 262-92; Helen Fail, Jeff Thompson, and George Walker, "Belonging, Identity, and Third Culture Kids," *Journal of Research in International Education* 3, no. 3 (2004): 319-38; Hoersting and Jenkins, "No Place to Call Home: Cultural Homelessness, Self-Esteem and Cross-Cultural Identities," 17-30; Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing up among Worlds*, 85-167; Barbara F. Schaetti and Sheila J. Ramsey, "The Global Nomad Experience: Living in Liminality," *Mobility* 20, no. 9 (1999); Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *Portable Roots: Transplanting the Bicultural Child* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 5, 31, 104.

¹⁵ Schaetti, "Global Nomad Identity: Hypothesizing a Developmental Model," 74.

¹⁶ Nina Wurgaft, "Also Known As: An Exploration of Cultural Hybridity" (PsyD dissertation, Antioch New England Graduate School, 2006), 96.

¹⁷ Kate A. Walters and Faith P. Auton-Cuff, "A Story to Tell: The Identity Development of Women Growing up as Third Culture Kids," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 12, no. 7 (2009): 770, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13674670903029153>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 75-78.

however, focused only on gender and left out information about the participants' nationalities, ethnicities, race, or socioeconomic status.

Studies by Lise Sparrow and Danau Tanu represent the few studies on minoritized TCKs that stress the need for contextual analysis and actually follow through with them.¹⁹ Sparrow's "Beyond the Multicultural Man: Complexities of Identity" critiqued a seminal article in intercultural communication by Peter Adler.²⁰ Adler proposed in 1977 that contemporary society was constructing a new kind of "multicultural man" who would not identify with one culture but stand outside of multiple cultures with the ability to negotiate and process identity in fluid ways.²¹ Building on Adler's theory, intercultural development theorist Milton Bennett suggested a model of intercultural sensitivity that envisioned the final stage of intercultural development as one's ability to see through multiple cultural perspectives and construct one's own reality on the margins.²² According to Bennett, intercultural sensitivity would help people rise above cultural conflicts. In contrast to Adler and Bennett, Sparrow brings in the lived experiences of minoritized TCKs who complicate this vision of multicultural identity. In Sparrow's study, minoritized TCKs shared how difficult it was to stand apart from multiple contexts and live without the constraints of competing cultural claims.²³ She also addressed issues of gender, pointing out the discrepancies between the model of the lone ranger "multicultural man" and the experiences of women who tend to build strong relational connections and exercise high levels of intercultural sensitivity.²⁴ When women do find themselves on the margins, Sparrow's interview data suggested, that it wasn't due to lack of

¹⁹ Lise Sparrow, "Beyond the Multicultural Man: Complexities of Identity," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 24 (2000): 173-201; Danau Tanu, "Unpacking "Third Culture Kids": The Transnational Lives of Young People at an International School in Indonesia" (Dissertation, University of Western Australia, 2013), 11.

²⁰ Sparrow, "Beyond the Multicultural Man: Complexities of Identity." 174.

²¹ Adler, "Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Cultural and Multicultural Man," 26.

²² Milton J. Bennett, "Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity," in *Education for the Intercultural Experience*, ed. R. M. Paige (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1993), 21-76.

²³ Sparrow, "Beyond the Multicultural Man: Complexities of Identity," 175.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

intercultural sensitivity but rather sexism or prejudice. Based on the experiences of minoritized TCKs, Sparrow clarifies contextual issues, such as racism and sexism that complicate their identity formation. Drawing on interviews of diverse, minoritized TCKs, Sparrow describes the identity development of minoritized TCK women with a botanical image of roots—how minoritized TCK women tend to grow deeper in their roots rather than stand separately above their sociopolitical realities. Whether the roots symbolized their families, solidarity with other marginalized identities, or religion, the women in the study grew in their connection and openness to their communities and commitments.²⁵

Sparrow's research provides a rare window into minoritized TCKs' identity formation and contextual analysis, but I wished that her argument did not suggest an either/or situation that made it sound like minoritized TCKs always grow roots and aim to be connected. As my data analysis will show, minoritized TCKs choose values that are most meaningful for them, even if it means pulling their roots out of certain spaces and standing apart in the margins. There is a place for standing apart in the margins as well as connecting and growing roots in those interstices. My research articulates this point and parallels Sparrow's contextual analysis of minoritized TCKs with an emphasis on the role of faith and theological reflection.

Danau Tanu is another scholar who writes incisively about the need for TCK literature to move away from White expatriate perspectives in order to engage in broader, interdisciplinary conversations with scholarship on migration and identity.²⁶ She criticizes the current scholarship's tendencies to essentialize TCK experiences without attending to power relations. Her ethnographic study of Asian TCKs at an international school in Indonesia addressed issues of cultural hierarchies

²⁵ Ibid., 194.

²⁶ Danau Tanu, "Toward an Interdisciplinary Analysis of the Diversity of "Third Culture Kids"," in *Migration, Diversity, and Education: Beyond Third Culture Kids*, ed. Saija Benjamin and Fred Dervin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 32.

and differences that do not dissolve seamlessly into a “third culture.”²⁷ She points to colonial legacies that shape the current global economy and how these factors impact TCKs differently depending on contextual variables, such as nationality, linguistic ability, socio-economic status, or reasons for moving.²⁸ Particularly, she raises the problem of international school cultures and curriculum that cultivate Eurocentric elitism and Western capitalistic values while celebrating its “diversity.”²⁹ Tanu’s work approaches international school culture from a postcolonial perspective to rethink who defines “international” and to analyze the field’s blind spot in centering the experiences of White TCKs. While I share Tanu’s postcolonial lens in TCK research, her study differs from mine in that she observed Asian TCK youth in an international school context and clarified how power dynamics played out in their social and educational spaces. My research focuses on how minoritized young adult TCKs look back on their youth and make sense of their identities, exploring the roles of race, class, gender, and faith in their identity formation.

Erikson’s Developmental Theory

Since psychoanalyst Erik Erikson’s developmental stages have been one of the most foundational theoretical frameworks for identity formation, I briefly review his developmental stages in relationship to children, youth, and culture.

In *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, Erikson presents a view of human development in a progressive and expanding schema of eight psychosocial stages from birth to death.³⁰ Each stage presents a specific developmental pull or inclination toward polar directions that one encounters in that particular phase of life. ***Trust vs. mistrust***, for instance, becomes an infant’s first developmental

²⁷ Ibid., 27.

²⁸ Ibid., 31.

²⁹ Danau Tanu, *Global Nomads: Towards a Study of ‘Asian’ Third Culture Kids*, 17th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia (Melbourne: 2008), 8.

³⁰ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 1st edition ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 94.

task. In this stage, the infant learns to internalize the world as a secure or unsafe world depending on her overall experience of her primary caregivers in the first years of life. If the infant experiences an adequately caring, responsive, and safe environment, the baby learns to develop a basic trust in relationship to the world. On the other hand, if the baby experiences predominantly neglectful parenting or consistently hostile environment, the baby learns that the world is not a safe place where she can rely on others. As the child gains more independent mobility and ability to speak, the toddler seeks to do things on his own in the second stage of *autonomy vs. shame and doubt*. In this stage, developmental tasks, such as toilet training, teaches the child positive affirmation or shame and doubt as he learns what is acceptable or not acceptable. In the third stage of *initiative vs. guilt*, the child grows in the ability to carry out thoughts and actions as well as the capacity to reflect on the consequences of her initiatives. Then from grade school to puberty, the child learns to complete tasks that set her up for more successful integration in the widening social spheres of peers and school. This fourth stage is called *industry versus inferiority*.

The fifth stage, *identity versus role confusion*, has been particularly influential in shaping the topic of identity formation in research literature. The central tasks of this stage involve trying on various roles and identities, sifting through social, cultural, or religious values, and consolidating what seems meaningful and true about oneself in relationship to society.³¹ Erikson describes this stage as testing, embracing, and renegotiating a sense of self in relationship to one's social context and environment. He viewed the *ego* as a "central and partially unconscious organizing agency" that is constantly in the process of synthesizing its "abandoned and anticipated selves."³² Although change and synthesis happen all throughout life, Erikson viewed identity formation as the "most important accomplishment" of adolescence in which youth practice "selective repudiation and

³¹ Ibid., 87.

³² Ibid., 211.

assimilation of childhood identifications” toward a new integration.³³ In other words, they evaluate their values, social prototypes, and ideological commitments in search of a coherent sense of identity and belonging in society. Mapping out their position in society through shared “rituals, tasks, transactions,” adolescents locate themselves through these cultural coordinates as part of their identity formation.³⁴ Erikson called this process “cultural consolidation.”³⁵

For his time, Erikson showed a rare attentiveness to the importance of culture in human development, but the way that he outlined his theory leaves out those whose experiences do not follow the theory’s trajectory or those that society pushes to the margins.³⁶ His theory implies that life unfolds in linear, hierarchical stages. Deviations from these norms seemingly suggest pathological or “derailed” development.³⁷ Feminist developmental theorists challenged the limitations of such normative templates that reflected white middle class male contexts more than women’s experiences.³⁸ Particularly in today’s globalized world, cultural consolidation can be complicated for children and youth growing up in multiple “cultural coordinates.”³⁹ Rather than mistake these complex processes as deviations from the norm, Erikson’s developmental theory can serve as descriptions of important developmental markers and changes that can occur throughout our lifetime, not necessarily in linear order. From this perspective, Erikson’s description of cultural consolidation does not have to be prescriptive for adolescents, but it can certainly be descriptive in relation to the experiences of Korean American TCKs.

³³ Ibid., 159.

³⁴ Ibid., 31.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Melinda A. McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories: Toward a Postcolonial Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 89.

³⁷ Cooper-White, “Human Development in a Relational and Cultural Context,” 103.

³⁸ See Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, “Meeting at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development,” *Feminism & Psychology* 3, no. 1 (1993): 11-35; Nicola Slee, *Women’s Faith Development: Patterns and Processes* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 18.

³⁹ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, 25.

Narrative Personality Development Theory

Since Erik Erikson, developmental psychologists have generally perceived the period of late adolescence as a crucial time in which youth begin to negotiate their identities. Psychologist McAdams describes the various tasks that youth face in identity negotiation:

They must figure out who they are and how they are to live, love, and work in adult society. They must find a way to draw upon their talents, traits, and past experiences to articulate and embody a meaningful adult life, a life that situates them within a satisfying and productive niche in society and provides them with a deep sense of psychological continuity, fidelity, and meaning.⁴⁰

McAdams describes the values and questions that are meaningful for North American middle-class youth and young adults with the privilege of finding a satisfying and productive niche in a capitalist society. Not everyone has the luxury of choosing from options that provide meaningful life and work. Working class men and women with less education may not have as much access to stable jobs. Context impacts the kinds of tasks that people face in identity formation as well as the timeline.

Noting the importance of context in identity formation, psychologist Jeffrey Arnett observed that societal changes have created a new developmental phase that he called “emerging adulthood.”⁴¹ For example, declining job opportunities and longer educational/professional training led to a prolonged phase of flux and change in the lives of many youth and young adults in the U.S.⁴² As a result, more and more young adults were settling down in their careers in their late twenties or thirties. The twenties into early thirties became an extended time of instability and change as young adults were still figuring out their work, identity, or relationships. It is these developmental changes

⁴⁰ Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, Revised and Expanded Edition. ed. (New York: Oxford University, 2013), 6.

⁴¹ Jeffrey J. Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University, 2014), 2.

⁴² Ibid.

that led Arnett to name this developmental period from late adolescence to late twenties, *emerging adulthood*.⁴³

The concept of emerging adulthood as an extended period of identity development names and normalizes how changing contexts influence human development. Emerging adulthood relates to the challenges TCKs encounter in that if changing contexts shape human development, TCKs most probably will need an extended period in their twenties to figure out who they are after moving around in so many different cultures in their childhood and adolescence. TCK research confirms this need in that TCKs face “delays” in development in certain areas while showing early signs of development in other areas due to their mobile upbringing.⁴⁴ For instance, TCKs may feel much more independent and mature as the result of skills they have developed in traveling all over the world or handling new situations alone. On the other hand, they may experience “delayed adolescence” after internalizing and processing so many different cultural rules and values.⁴⁵ Balancing and responding to the demands of their constantly changing environments can prolong the time it takes for them to figure out which beliefs, values, and practices to retain or reject.

Rather than label these different developmental time periods as “delayed” or “slow,” I turn to McAdams’ narrative personality development theory as an alternative framework for conceptualizing TCK identity formation. If TCKs face the challenge of putting together the many pieces of their international lives, one way to take the disparate pieces and to make sense of them is to craft a meaningful life story.⁴⁶ McAdams’ narrative personality development theory provides a way for TCKs to exercise their own agency and authorship in the way they construct their identities. McAdams suggests that the human life span consists of “three layers”—“the *actor*, the *agent*, and the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing up among Worlds*, 144-57.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁴⁶ McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, 62.

author.⁴⁷ The *actor* refers to the distinct set of traits and style that a person brings to the stage of life. As persons grow, they begin to form goals, motives, projects, and values that express *agency* in shaping their lives towards the future. This task becomes paramount in the late teenage years when they face the challenges of *identity*. A growing sense of agency goes hand in hand with the stories that people *author* about themselves—who they are, how they got to be there, what motivates their agency, etc.⁴⁸

McAdams calls these evolving stories that people tell about themselves, *narrative identities*.⁴⁹ According to McAdams, narrative identity begins to take shape in the emerging adulthood years when young people develop the ability to weigh and choose different hypothetical options in life and exercise the full extent of their abstract thinking regarding work, love, life's meaning, or purpose.⁵⁰ Narrative identities feature *autobiographical reasoning*, which explains how certain aspects of our personality came to be, what motivated us to take the life trajectories that we took, why certain values and goals are dear to us, and the directions in which these developments are headed in the future.⁵¹ Narrative identities are important not just because these stories reflect who we are but also because of the significant ways in which these stories continually shape who we are becoming. McAdams notes, "With each story told, the self changes a little bit. Selves create stories, which in turn create selves, over and over, through conversation and introspection."⁵² In other words, we selectively string together stories of ourselves in a process of repetition, deletion, revision, integration, and dissemination, which over time leads not only to a somewhat coherent life plot but

⁴⁷ Dan P. McAdams, *The Art and Science of Personality Development* (New York: Guilford, 2015), 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁴⁹ McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, 62.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵¹ McAdams, *The Art and Science of Personality Development*, 251.

⁵² McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, 65.

also in many ways shapes how we live our lives.⁵³ Articulating a “*suitable narrative identity*,” McAdams states, is “*the central developmental task of emerging adulthood in many lives [...]*.”⁵⁴

Narrative personality development theory makes a lot of sense for the changing life contexts of TCKs. While they come into the world as actors with certain traits and dispositions, they find themselves having to adjust and adapt to multiple different stages, sets, roles, and scripts when they move among different countries. Somewhere in that process, they strive to find agency the midst of all the roles, relationships, and scripts that they have rehearsed, practiced, and internalized. I am interested in how TCKs author their life stories, especially since their childhood and youth have thrown so many different sets and roles at them. If narrative identity is the “*central developmental task of emerging adulthood in many lives*,” I wanted to find out how Korean American TCK emerging adults tell their stories about the diverse cultural, ideological, economic, and social worlds that they have navigated.

Pastoral Theological Literature on TCKs

Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner is the only pastoral theologian who has written explicitly on the topic of TCKs. Her dissertation, *Theological Dimensions of Maturation in a Missionary Milieu*, used a mixed methods approach to study the theological profiles of missionary children, who are a subset of TCKs. She explored their religious values, ethical norms, and theological concepts as important factors in tracing personality development. She found that the missionary children faced the challenges of disruptions in their “cultural, geographic, and historical unity” due to repeated moves.⁵⁵ These disruptions were further complicated by the discrepancy the children felt between feeling

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ McAdams, *The Art and Science of Personality Development*, 316.

⁵⁵ Jeanne Stevenson Moessner, *Theological Dimensions of Maturation in a Missionary Milieu*, *European University Studies Series Xxiii*, *Theology* (Berne ; New York: P. Lang, 1989), 224.

superior in their mission contexts and feeling inferior when they returned to their passport countries. While these were destabilizing factors in their identity development, the missionary communities tried to create a sense of security in their theologically conservative religious enclaves. This “heightened religiosity” among missionaries could further entrench a deeper insulation from the larger society, which the missionaries made sense of theologically as sojourners passing through the world.⁵⁶ Such religious insulation and culturally destabilizing moves could complicate missionary children’s identity formation. Noting that TCKs were experiencing the opposite of cultural consolidation, Stevenson-Moessner coined the term, “cultural dissolution” to describe the fragmented experiences of TCKs when their attempts to synthesize their multiple cultural experiences fall apart.⁵⁷ While her research was seminal in delving into psychological and theological implications of the development of missionary children, the dissertation did not analyze power relations or identity social constructs, such as race, gender, or class that impact identity formation.

Stevenson-Moessner’s more recent book, *Portable Roots: Transplanting the Bicultural Child* reflects a creative integration of botany, psychology, sociology, and pastoral theology. She raises awareness of the need for theories of identity formation to take seriously the delicate and “arduous” process of “[digging] up the roots of one’s identity and [replanting] those roots in another cultural soil.”⁵⁸ Building on this botanical metaphor, Stevenson-Moessner analyzes power dynamics somewhat by describing the “tendrils of power” that can wrap themselves around an organism and impede growth. Specifically, she explores power dynamics in only one of her interviewees’ stories—the story of Ruth Carson West, who is white. What is highlighted in this anecdote is that Ruth “relinquished” her power in an incident in which her school named a Filipino national as the valedictorian even

⁵⁶ Ibid., 225.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁵⁸ Stevenson-Moessner, *Portable Roots: Transplanting the Bicultural Child*, 224.

though she had achieved a higher GPA.⁵⁹ Stevenson-Moessner closes the analysis by stating that while “children like Ruth had socio-economic advantages” and while postcolonial critiques point out many missionaries’ cultural insensitivity, the missionary children that she interviewed “are among some of the most egalitarian and self-effacing persons” she has known (95). Ruth Carson West’s narrative reflects the formation of a White TCK with relative privilege who had the option to loosen some of the “tendrils of power” to allow another to grow. Along with Ruth, most of Stevenson-Moessner’s interview participants had U.S. citizenship and represented Euro-American perspectives. This led me to wonder about the stories of minoritized TCKs of color and their experiences of tendrils of power. Stevenson-Moessner’s power analysis would have been more well-rounded if she had included the voices of minoritized TCKs and their experiences with race, gender, class, or faith. Moreover, I wondered about her justification for settling on the term *bicultural* to refer to those who inhabit more than two cultural worlds. *Bicultural* implies a binary between two things, which fails to capture the multiple, ambiguous, and fluid experiences of TCKs. Building on her work, I focus on the narratives of minoritized TCKs and delve more deeply into issues of power that impact their identity formation.

A related topic that is similar to the topic of TCKs is Sophia Park’s research on “Pastoral Care for the 1.5 Generation: In-between Space as the “New” Cultural Space.”⁶⁰ 1.5 generation is a sociological term coined by Ruben Rumbaut in the 1970s.⁶¹ It describes persons who can navigate fluidly between the first-generation immigrant culture and North American culture. Park states that 1.5 generation people possess a certain “degree of knowledge and the command to navigate in both

⁵⁹ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁰ Sophia Park, "Pastoral Care for the 1.5 Generation: In-between Space as the “New” Cultural Space," in *Women out of Order: Risking Change and Creating Care in a Multicultural World*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner and Teresa Snorton (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 230-42.

⁶¹ Ruben Rumbaut, "Ages, Life Stages, and Generational Cohorts: Decomposing the Immigrant First and Second Generations in the United States," *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 1166.

cultural systems,” but they may also struggle from not fully fitting in either of the cultures.⁶² Park proposes that the marginalized space in between cultures can be a creative, potential space where these bilingual and bicultural persons can “function as a bridge between Korean and Western cultures.”⁶³ While the 1.5 generation experience may be similar to TCK’s experiences of having their feet planted in more than one culture, my research seeks to expand the conversation on bi-culturality because it is too narrow to capture TCKs’ complex experiences of transnational belonging in our globalized context. TCKs move in between not only two but multiple cultures, with varying levels of cultural and linguistic abilities in relationship to each. Park presents an idealistic picture of 1.5 generations’ bicultural and bilingual abilities, but in reality, those who can really move fluently in both worlds are few. Not all TCKs have the ability to be bridgemakers nor do they desire that role. Rather than assign a number that cannot capture the complex spectrum of multiple cultural belonging among TCKs, I think it is important for TCKs to assess their relationship to each culture that has become a part of their lives. Since none of my research participants identified themselves as 1.5 generation, I note the literature here but seek to expand and create a space beyond biculturality to a Third Space, borrowing Homi Bhabha’s term (1994) —a space where Third Culture Kids can begin to resist homogenizing cultural identities and enunciate their own narrative identities.

Theological Literature on Identity

Miraslov Volf, in book *Exclusion and Embrace*, stresses the importance of theological reflection on identity in a time when our concepts of identity have the potential to oppress, marginalize, and even “cleanse” others who are perceived to be the other.⁶⁴ Against such exclusive

⁶² Park, "Pastoral Care for the 1.5 Generation: In-between Space as the “New” Cultural Space," in *Women out of Order: Risking Change and Creating Care in a Multicultural World*, 232.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Miraslov Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 74.

practices, Volf explores theological possibilities of imagining identity in ways that foster harmony and reconciliation. His theological argument for identity rejects both modern and postmodern frameworks—modernity for not taking seriously the reality of evil and postmodernity for undermining moral obligations “by rendering relationships ‘fragmentary’ and ‘discontinuous’.”⁶⁵ In lieu of these frameworks, Volf offers biblical narratives of God’s self-giving love as a framework for identity construction. God creates space for humanity as witnessed by Christ’s outstretched arms on the cross. The cross acknowledges the deep brokenness in the world, yet God’s radical hospitality on the cross reveals that nothing will separate God from being in relationship with us.

For Volf, identities are marked by clear boundaries not out of fearful disengagement but rather for the purpose of extending true hospitality. Without boundaries, belonging can be suffocating as it may force unity without room to be different.⁶⁶ On the other hand, too much distance “without belonging isolates.”⁶⁷ Therefore, Volf pushes for a relational self with clear boundaries, clear boundaries not referring to a set of fixed cultural particularities that one group possesses as opposed to another. “Such an essentialist understanding of cultural identity,” Volf notes, “[...] is not only oppressive—force must be used to keep everything foreign at bay—but it is also untenable.”⁶⁸ Rather, boundaries refer to *the distance* one has even in *belonging*. Belonging cannot simply integrate all otherness. There must be a line from which to perceive and discern evil in our own culture as well as others. The criteria for judging evil in cultures stems from the Gospel through the multiple voices of the “many bodies of different peoples situated in the one body of Christ.”⁶⁹

To illustrate how one embodies both distance and belonging through the Gospel, Volf uses Abraham’s call narrative to explain how one’s departure from home to a strange land does not have

⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 50.

to mean a cutting off or complete loss. Rather, one's departure can be an example of how God's people can be grounded in their cultural and spiritual identities with greater perspective than if they had never left:

Their [Abraham's departure] "strangeness" results not from the negative act of cutting all ties, but from the positive act of giving allegiance to God and God's promised future. Stepping out of their culture, they do not float in some indeterminate space, looking at the world from everywhere and anywhere. Rather with one foot planted in their own culture and the other in God's future—internal difference—they have a vantage point from which to perceive and judge the self and the other not simply on their own terms but in the light of God's new world—a world in which a great multitude "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" is gathered "before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9; 5:9).⁷⁰

The purpose of departure, when interpreted this way, can be the work of the Spirit, who helps "loosen the grip of our culture on us" and empowers us to live with deeper discernment regarding its "fluidity" and "hybridity."⁷¹ In order for such discernment to happen, Volf pushes for an *ecumenical community*, which can call us out when culture distorts our faith, as should be the case when faith serves racist, nationalist agenda like the Nazi regime or upholds America as the only truly Christian nation.⁷² Such ecumenical community offers both distance and belonging as the voices of Christians from other cultures help establish the distance we need from our own cultures to hear the voice of Jesus Christ more clearly, yet not too much distance that we are isolated without belonging.⁷³

Volf's theological perspective on identity informs the ways in which TCKs can make sense of their hybrid identities. For TCKs, who have left home to reside as strangers in many countries, the concepts of home, belonging, and identity can be complex and often painful, compounded by multiple layers of loss and experiences of exclusion during their transitions. Volf's theological understanding of identity, however, normalizes hybrid identities and makes belonging more just and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁷¹ Ibid., 52.

⁷² Ibid., 53.

⁷³ Ibid.

lifegiving precisely because of one's departure. By normalizing hybrid identities, I refer to Volf's idea that cultural identity should no longer be defined by fixed cultural criteria that separates a unified "we" from an external "them." Volf normalizes leaving one's own culture to enter into another as an indispensable journey that provides the cultural and theological vantage points from which to embrace the self and the other. This integrated understanding of theological and cultural identity has the potential to reframe traditional notions of cultural belonging in ways that are empowering for TCKs who find themselves displaced and distraught from never fully belonging anywhere.

Brita L. Gill-Austern is a pastoral theologian who builds on Volf's work to expose practices of exclusion and dehumanization, especially in relation to poverty. Gill-Austern stresses the importance of holding in creative tension the intricate interdependence and the distinct differences that characterize relationships in nature and communities.⁷⁴ While embracing both similarities and differences would be ideal for harmonious, mutual human relationships, history shows a repeated mishandling of differences among human communities. Gill-Austern cites three such practices of exclusion from Volf's work: 1) *the violence of expulsion*, 2) *the violence of assimilation*, and 3) *the subjugation of the other*, and 3) *the indifference of abandonment*.⁷⁵

The violence of expulsion seeks to eliminate and systematically oppress those who are perceived to be different. Examples of the violence of expulsion include discrimination, segregation, housing regulations or school districts that privilege certain races or socioeconomic classes, and in extreme cases, ethnic cleansing.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Brita Gill-Austern, "Engaging Diversity and Difference: From Practice of Exclusion to Practices of Practical Solidarity," in *Injustice and the Care of Souls: Taking Oppression Seriously in Pastoral Care*, ed. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook and Karen Brown Montagno (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 30.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

The *violence of assimilation* is a subtler method of exclusion that creates a false sense of oneness by erasing the other's identity. One must surrender one's own identity to fit into the group that is imposing its identity and reality onto others. In the U.S., for example, the violence of assimilation manifests in the myth that all immigrants will eventually give up their language, culture, and customs to fit into one "dominant culture."⁷⁷

The *subjugation of the other* involves labeling others as inferior in some way and profiting from such false designations. For example, benefitting from subjugating others has historical precedence in colonialism, neocolonial global economic relations and gender inequalities.⁷⁸

Lastly, the *indifference of abandonment* describes what happens when we see but avert our gaze and do nothing. Distancing ourselves from other people's pain and turning off our sense of responsibility can be just as damaging in the ways that indifference provides an environment for oppression or inequalities to grow unchecked.

Gill-Austern focuses on practices of indifference and abandonment, particularly on those who have been made poor. She focuses on this group because (1) many U.S. citizens are likely to experience this form of exclusion; (2) much harm and suffering result from practices of indifference and abandonment against those who have been made poor; and (3) faith communities have the power to make a significant difference regarding this issue.⁷⁹ To address indifference of abandonment, she suggests "practices of practical solidarity," which consist of three movements with corresponding practices.⁸⁰

First, "Know Home" is an injunction to confront the systems of power that feed oppression and injustice in our own families, cultures, religions, and social spheres. The corresponding practice

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 35.

is “self-examination, confession, and repentance.”⁸¹ These practices help people examine their own wealth in relationship to the world’s needs and know how they are entangled in structures that exclude and oppress. Repentance, confession, and self-examination can include personal choices, such as buying consciously in ways that care for creation and workers’ fair wages. Communally, one can resist economic or healthcare policies that exacerbate practices of exclusion and abandonment.

The second move, “To Make Pilgrimage,” involves a “dehabitation” of some sort or leaving the familiar to experience life from another’s perspective.⁸² Gill-Austern names this practice, “constructive engagement with otherness.”⁸³ By this she means that opportunities to immerse oneself in diverse settings can be formative for those who learn to connect with others on some fundamental level, creating empathic connections. These connections fuel practices of solidarity and expand one’s “circle of awareness or concern.”⁸⁴

A pilgrimage calls for a return home, which is the third move. “Returning Home” requires a rearranging of priorities and commitments to foment new habits and spaces that hold the concerns of those who suffer under structures that oppress and perpetuate poverty.⁸⁵ Many times, changing the status quo creates tension and conflict, but such risk-taking is a necessary part of returning home. The practice that follows returning home is “partnering with others” because the greatest and most empowering changes come through people working together. If one person or group is powerless, oppression persists. Therefore, the practice of partnering with others seeks mutually empowering participation, respect, inclusion, and communication in the process.

Gill-Austern’s work illumines how deconstructing one’s environment and examining the practices and assumptions that exclude others can be the starting point for practices of solidarity.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 40.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 42.

This deconstructive self-examination is embedded in the narrative interviewing process of this research. While exploring the question about class, the participants recognized their own privileged positions and complicity in oppression in certain environments, while they grieved their experiences of exclusion when they were made poor at other times. Their stories also showed that their immersion experiences in diverse cultural contexts strengthened their sense of connection and empathy with those who were marginalized.

Narrative Pastoral Theology

Christie Cozad Neuger's *Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach* integrates narrative psychotherapy, feminist theology, and gender and cultural studies to offer a pastoral counseling approach for women that holds personal and systemic perspectives together for holistic assessment and healing. For example, rather than focus on women's "susceptibility" to certain issues, Neuger provides a bigger picture of the culture at large that puts women in particularly stressful and oppressive situations.⁸⁶ Specifically, Neuger delves into intimate violence, depression, and aging as common pastoral care contexts that women experience. Neuger's feminist paradigm weaves theological, cultural, and psychotherapeutic resources in a fourfold approach--"(1) coming to voice, (2) gaining clarity, (3) making choices, and (4) staying connected."⁸⁷ Just as Neuger's paradigm seeks to help counselees reclaim their voices in resistance to oppressive discourses, I want to build a paradigm in which Korean American TCKs can gain clarity about the complex layers of their intercultural upbringing, resist narratives that oppress, and become "co-authors and co-creators" of healing and empowering narrative identities.⁸⁸ Co-authoring and co-creating refers to the connection

⁸⁶ Christie Cozad Neuger, *Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 28.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

and accountability human beings have in the stories that they create with one another, creation, and with God.

Karen Scheib's *Pastoral Care: Telling the Stories of Our Lives* stresses the importance of listening to people's every day stories as an "ecclesial practice of pastoral care."⁸⁹ Scheib's NET (Narrative, Ecclesial, Theological) model of pastoral care draws on narrative research from a wide variety of angles—psychology, therapy, gerontology, medicine, literary studies, and theology. While building on narrative studies from these disciplines, Scheib claims the distinctiveness of narrative pastoral care "as an ecclesial, theological practice through which we listen to lifestories in order to discern the intersection of human stories and God's story in the context of community and culture."⁹⁰ By *ecclesial practice*, she means that narrative pastoral care flows out of the "larger mission and ministry of the church," which are grounded in the story of God's redeeming and healing love for humankind.⁹¹ The church carries a responsibility to "proclaim, interpret, and live out" this story of God's love, a love that overflows beyond the church community.⁹² Narrative pastoral care is also a *theological practice*, which carefully explores the embodied theologies in the network of stories that we live out in our families, communities, cultures, and faith.⁹³ Scheib's NET model informs this study's attention to the role of religious narratives and their embedded theologies, which provide powerful interpretive frameworks for understanding the self, one's belonging, sense of purpose, and core commitments.

⁸⁹ Scheib, *Pastoral Care: Telling the Stories of Our Lives*, 26.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Chapter 2

Research Method and Methodology

Research Paradigm

Because my research focuses on minoritized TCKs' own interpretations of their diverse and complex lived experiences, I chose narrative inquiry as my research method. Narrative inquiry explores people's stories as important qualitative data for understanding experience. It offers the method that best fits my research focus on how minoritized TCKs organize and make meaning out of the different threads of their international experiences. It also supports my postcolonial feminist approach that seeks to disrupt claims of dominant discourses on youth development that exclude the lived experiences of minoritized groups and render their unique experiences invisible or abnormal.

I approached this study from a narrative therapeutic perspective, which assumes that the stories that people tell are not value-neutral. They are laden with socio-cultural, political, historical, and religious values. Drawing on Foucauldian resistance against totalizing discourses and Derridean deconstructionist practices, narrative therapy theorist Michael White proposed therapeutic practices that pay attention to oppressive discourses and power structures in people's lives.⁹⁴ Discerning which stories get expressed while others remain silenced, narrative therapy weighs the psychological impact of these stories, checking whether the messages are empowering persons with the resources and energy to help move their lives in the directions that they desire. Narratives that are oppressive can be named so that people can re-examine and deconstruct them in search of other interpretations that offer more liberating and empowering possibilities. This narrative therapeutic lens shaped the

⁹⁴ Michael White, *Re-Authoring Lives: Interviews and Essays, Reauthoring Lives* (Adelaide, S. Aust.: Dulwich Centre Publications, 1995), 26.

way that I listened to participants' stories and attended to messages that were reinforced or silenced as well as the impact of these messages on their lives.

Since this research explores Korean American TCKs' interpretations of their experiences and how they make sense of their identities, a qualitative design best fits the interpretive purposes of this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln, "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible."⁹⁵ This research seeks to make visible the contexts of minoritized TCKs and the interpretive processes reflected in their narrative identities.

In particular, I used *narrative inquiry*, which explores stories told by individuals regarding their lived experiences as qualitative data. Narrative inquiry was the most appropriate qualitative method for this research because the method allows space for minoritized TCKs to present their diverse and complex experiences in their own voices. Plot development helps trace people's journeys of identity construction—how they changed and developed over time. Since stories are situated "within participants' personal experiences (their jobs, their homes), their culture (racial, ethnic), and their historical contexts (time and place),"⁹⁶ narrative inquiry supported my interests in contextual issues that have been overlooked in past research. Exploring how the research participants organized and made meaning out of the different threads of their international experiences, I studied their stories' structure, characters, unfolding plot, turning points, conflicts, themes, epiphanies or resolutions. I also looked for deconstructive elements within the stories, "exposing dichotomies, examining silences, and attending to disruptions and contradictions."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, Fourth Edition. ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013), 6.

⁹⁶ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2017), Section 4 (E-book).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

The philosophical perspectives that undergird my narrative approach include *phenomenology, social constructivism, postmodernism, feminist theory, postcolonialism, and narrative therapy theory*. A phenomenological perspective prioritizes “people’s experiences and how they interpret the world” over whether something happened, how it happened or its repetition in connection to other circumstances.⁹⁸ Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* reflects this phenomenological lens and social constructivism to assert that reality or meaning is what human beings interpret, construct, and negotiate in social, cultural, and historical contexts.⁹⁹ A social constructivist approach is important to this research because it negates the view that there is a “single, observable reality”¹⁰⁰ to which all human development or identity construction must conform. Often, dominant discourse has excluded the lived experiences of minority groups, rendering their unique experiences invisible, abnormal, and at worst, pathological. Therefore, a social constructivist approach can create room for a re-negotiation of meanings according to the subjective experiences and interpretations that people bring.

Deconstructing dominant discourse or grand narratives reflects a postmodernist perspective. Postmodernism refers to “a set of assumptions, critiques, and strategies” that emerged after the mid-to-late twentieth century disillusionment in the “saving power” of scientific advancement and human rationality.¹⁰¹ Pastoral theologian Pamela Cooper-White provides a helpful explanation of six major tenets at the heart of postmodern thought: 1) an unraveling of confidence in human rationality as a trustworthy guide for understanding all that is good and true; 2) a breakdown in claims of “objectivity” since no observer can be fully removed from his or her perspectives/biases;

⁹⁸ Michael Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015), 116.

⁹⁹ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Anchor Books ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 19-46.

¹⁰⁰ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, Fourth edition. ed., *The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 9.

¹⁰¹ Pamela Cooper-White, *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 13.

3) a recognition that “truth, fact, and discovery” reflect provisional, fragile, and situated truths of the “local and particular” rather than universal, timeless realities; 4) a deconstructive perspective regarding the privileged status of certain “truths” or reality ; 5) a postpositive perspective, which neither insists on Enlightenment scientific logic as the only way of knowing, nor resorts to pure constructivism (the view that all reality is human generated knowledge that arises within social interactions); and finally, 6) a discernment about the emotional impact behind every truth (i.e. is it empowering or enslaving?) and deciphering who benefits from the emotional weight of such messages.¹⁰² My research design reflects these postmodernist assumptions by deconstructing the privileged status of white Eurocentric theories of identity formation that do not reflect the lived experiences of minoritized TCKs. This inductive approach arrives at knowledge construction from the local and particular lived experiences of people’s narratives, validating *embodied knowledge*¹⁰³ and understanding that the final report remains open, descriptive, and provisional. The research also weighs the emotional weight of socio-cultural and religious messages in minoritized TCKs’ narratives, seeking to better understand which ones are empowering or enslaving.

Closely related to postmodernism are *critical race*, *feminist*, and *postcolonial* theories— approaches that analyze power relations, challenge oppression, and seek to transform the status quo by change or empowerment. For example, critical race theory shapes this researcher’s assumptions about the tremendous conscious and unconscious impacts of race on persons’ identities.¹⁰⁴ Feminist theory informs the researcher’s analysis of narratives for patriarchal, sexist, or discriminatory ideologies that oppress people based on their gender or sexual orientations. Postcolonial theory pays

¹⁰² Ibid., 13-17.

¹⁰³ *Embodied knowledge* refers to knowledge acquired not only through reason and intellect but also through life experiences felt and lived through the body.

¹⁰⁴ Robert T. Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy: Toward a Racially Inclusive Model*, *Wiley Series on Personality Processes* (New York: Wiley, 1995), 4-5.

special attention to sociopolitical, literary, economic, cultural, and historical analyses of colonial presence. It seeks to disrupt Western hegemony and its reinforcement of so-called “objective” knowledge, norms, and values sedimented in the academy, society, religion, culture, politics, economics, and the psyche.¹⁰⁵ Recognizing “the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, [and] peoples,”¹⁰⁶ this study seeks to disrupt the pattern of White Eurocentric TCK research and share the silenced stories of Korean American TCKs. In summary, critical race theory, feminist theory, and postcolonial theory inform my research questions regarding power relations—“who has it, how it’s negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power, and so on.”¹⁰⁷ These critical orientations shape my research convictions that aim to name and resist white Euro-American hegemonic, patriarchal power structures toward more empowering formative experiences for minoritized TCKs.

Narrative therapy theory posits that human beings are “interpreting beings.”¹⁰⁸ We are constantly interpreting our lives, and for our interpretations to mean something, they need to be based on some sort of intelligible point of reference. *Stories* serve as that frame of reference. Meanings derived from interpretations of stories are not value-neutral but laden with socio-political, cultural, historical, and religious values. The stories people tell about themselves “[determine] which aspects of our lived experience get expressed, and [...] determines the shape of the expression of our lived experience.”¹⁰⁹ Narrative therapy theory examines the stories that people tell and seek to affirm possible interpretations that offer more liberating, just, and empowering possibilities. This narrative therapeutic lens shapes the way I listened to participants’ stories and sought to bring their experiences to light. Minoritized TCKs’ lived experiences of identity formation have been largely

¹⁰⁵ Pui-lan Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 3.

¹⁰⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 245.

¹⁰⁷ Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ White, *Re-Authoring Lives: Interviews and Essays*, 13.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

neglected in pastoral care and TCK literature, leaving minoritized TCKs to deduce that their experiences are not important or that they are aberrations from normal development. By acknowledging their experiences and highlighting narratives of creative agency, this research represents one step toward expanding and enriching the tapestry of narrative identity in an interstitial, intercultural milieu.

In summary, a *phenomenological* approach supports this study's interest in the ways subjects experience life and make meaning. *Social constructivist* theory asserts that there is no single, absolute reality but rather multiple realities created through ongoing discursive practices. This philosophical assumption grounds this study's descriptive and open approach to people's diverse interpretations as knowledge worth studying. *Postmodernism's* suspicion of grand narratives leads this study to favor small-scale narratives of individuals and their particular contexts. *Critical race theory*, *feminist theory*, and *postcolonialism* provide the hermeneutical lenses for examining how participants make sense of their lives in relation to power structures, and how their narratives reflect, resist, and/or transform those structures. Along similar lines, *narrative therapy theory* shapes the researcher's attention to the messages that are being reinforced or silenced, examining the impact of these messages on people's lives.

Pastoral Theological Method:

This study is grounded in Emmanuel Lartey's intercultural pastoral theological paradigm, which is the latest paradigm among four major paradigms named and recognized in the history of pastoral care and pastoral theology: 1) classical-clerical paradigm, 2) clinical-pastoral paradigm, 3) communal-contextual, and 4) **intercultural paradigm**.¹¹⁰ These paradigms point to the recognition

¹¹⁰ For in-depth discussion on these pastoral theological paradigms, see Nancy J. Ramsay, ed. *Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004); John Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

and naming of different emphases during the development of the field, not distinct demarcations or abolition of previous paradigms at the emergence of new ones.¹¹¹ I provide a brief summary of these paradigms below to contextualize the intercultural paradigm used in this study.

The *classical-clerical* paradigm refers to a traditional model of Euro-American pastoral care and pastoral theology that focuses mostly on the activities and reflections of Christian clergy. Within this paradigm, caring activities may consist of ministerial duties in caring for the congregation, such as individual or family consultation, public preaching, prayer, or Bible studies.¹¹² The *clinical-pastoral* paradigm marks a heavy influence of Western psychological and clinical theories on pastoral theology and pastoral care practices.¹¹³ Psychotherapeutic theories, existential philosophies, and Western psychological concepts of self, healing, and care practices undergird pastoral theology and pastoral care practices. The communal-contextual paradigm, on the other hand, pushes against this uncritical adoption of Euro-American medical and social scientific norms and engages the roles of power and privilege in the shaping of pastoral theology and care. Appropriate to this paradigm, pastoral theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore reframes human relationality from Anton Boisen's classical "living human document" to the "living human web" as a way to expand pastoral theological concerns to systemic injustices and oppressions that influence the care of persons and communities.¹¹⁴

Lartey's *intercultural* paradigm expands the communal-contextual paradigm's systemic scope beyond the Euro-American to the global arena, privileging the polylingual, polyphonic, and religiously pluralistic contexts in pastoral theology and pastoral care around the world. The

¹¹¹ Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Peterborough England: Epworth, 2006), 122.

¹¹² Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Pastoral Theology as Public Theology: Revolutions in the "Fourth Area" " in *Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms*, ed. Nancy J. Ramsay (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 50.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "The Human Web: Reflections on the State of Pastoral Theology," *Christian Century* (April 7 1993): 366-69.

intercultural paradigm critically examines processes of globalization--the import and export of things, beliefs, paradigms, worldviews, and habits that influence and shape cultures--particularly Western culture being exported to “Third World”¹¹⁵ countries.¹¹⁶ It recognizes colonial asymmetries that negated Third World people’s wisdom and practices of care and invites previously marginalized voices from the globe to the table in pastoral theology and pastoral care. International partners and pastoral theologians in the US both interrogate and construct new ways and forms of caring that are not simply *cross-cultural* but *intercultural*.¹¹⁷ Lartey makes the distinction that cross-cultural tends to convey a one-way immersion that highlights the other’s differences, while intercultural assumes a reciprocal interchange in which differences from both sides inform, conflict, and shape the dialogue partners.¹¹⁸ In this mutual encounter, the intercultural paradigm seeks to hold in creative tension the differences and ambiguities that arise in intercultural practices of pastoral theology and care. Through careful attention to contextual analyses from a global perspective, this paradigm aims to develop pastoral theologies and caring practices that are just, liberating, and respectful in the face of conflicting differences.

By privileging the lived experiences of three minoritized Korean women and analyzing the contextual layers in their narrative environments, this study follows the intercultural paradigm’s attention to “contextual experience and the analysis of that experience in its multi-layered and multi-

¹¹⁵ “Third World” is a somewhat contentious term. It originates from the Cold War era divisions of the capitalist First World, socialist Second World, and the “Third World” countries allied to neither. While the Cold War is over and there are other terms, such as “developing countries,” “Two-Thirds World,” or the “global South,” I use the term Third World because it highlights the historical legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism that created relationships marked by gross power inequities. Moreover, Homi Bhabha’s concept of “Third Space,” which describes an in-between space that resists binaries and hierarchical categories, presents new possibilities for revisioning old power relations and constructing new cultures and identities. See Pui-lan Kwok, *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women’s Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 1-2.

¹¹⁶ Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 43-44.

¹¹⁷ Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 2nd ed. (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2003), 166-77.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

factored reality.”¹¹⁹ Questions that arise out of minoritized TCKs’ experiences inform and interrogate sources from theological traditions to see how they withstand the test of lived realities. Finally, my pastoral theological reflections ponder new ways to imagine the sacred, the nature of human beings, and “the relationship between them.”¹²⁰ Based on the reflections arising from contextual and theological analyses, I suggest a pastoral theology of home and practices of care that are more culturally and spiritually appropriate for minoritized TCKs.

In addition to Lartey’s intercultural method, Scheib’s NET model and McGarrah Sharp’s postcolonial pastoral theology informed this study’s pastoral theological reflection on narratives. As indicated earlier, Scheib’s NET model asserts that the very practice of listening to people’s stories is an “ecclesial, theological practice through which we listen to lifestories in order to discern the intersection of human stories and God’s story in the context of community and culture.”¹²¹ As such, Scheib’s NET model informed my attention to the embodied theologies expressed in people’s stories about their identities, sense of belonging, purpose, and commitments. As I reflected on the women’s stories, I also looked for intersections with their stories and God’s stories. These stories included biblical narratives of displaced, wandering, and minoritized people working out their faith and identities. Moses, Abraham, Esther, and Jesus are a few of the people in the bible who navigated multiple cultures, exercising great courage and making significant decisions about who they needed to be as God’s people in competing religious and political contexts. Their narratives, as well as the Psalms and the wide range of human emotions provided important points of connection for theological reflection.

McGarrah Sharp’s *Misunderstanding Stories: Toward a Postcolonial Pastoral Theology* guided my reflection process when I felt conflicted about how to understand and write participant’s stories that

¹¹⁹ Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 89.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹²¹ Scheib, *Pastoral Care: Telling the Stories of Our Lives*, 4.

clashed strongly with my values or diverged from my assumptions. McGarrah Sharp asserts the importance of going beyond good intentions of empathy to entering into mutual recognition of “empathic failures” in intercultural crises.¹²² It is important to acknowledge and lament the frustrations that arise in these situations even as we seek to open ourselves to greater, shared vulnerability toward deeper intercultural understanding.¹²³ McGarrah Sharp states the challenges of such a seemingly simple yet difficult process:

French philosopher and spiritual thinker Simone Weil invites us to consider just how hard it is to give one’s attention to another person around the question: “What are you going through?” Misunderstanding stories often begin when we think we already know the answer and pass right on by such a paradoxically basic and profound question.¹²⁴

Her caution against assuming that I already know the right answer helped reorient me whenever I felt “caught in an intercultural crisis”¹²⁵ between interviewees’ stories and my interpretations. Rather than assert my interpretation under the cover of a postcolonial researcher’s lens, I intentionally tried to enter more fully into the interviewee’s experiences and honor the stories that they have lived. This practice helped me not to erase their histories and stories with my theories and theological assumptions. Rather, I wrote with greater empathy while holding my interpretations in creative tension. This reorienting process at times led to divergent results that did not fit into neat, unifying theological themes. Rather, it led me to acknowledge misunderstanding stories and intercultural crises as inevitable and important opportunities for resistance against dehumanizing representations.

¹²² McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories: Toward a Postcolonial Theology*, 177.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

Research Design

Data Gathering and Analysis

The study began in October of 2016 and closed in April 2018. Narrative inquiry focuses on the “experiences of a *single individual* or the lives of a small number of individuals,”¹²⁶ so I chose three young adult, Korean TCKs between ages 30 and 40, who spent a minimum of three years in at least two countries before the age of 18. I used purposeful sampling to gain access to participants who fit the criteria, as they would be most suited to “illuminate the inquiry question being investigated.”¹²⁷

Because of the small number of participants in this study, I focused the study only on women because diversifying gender identities in a study of three persons will not lead to any conclusive gender comparisons. I also chose to privilege Korean women’s voices to disrupt the Eurocentric, patriarchal discourse in TCK research. I focused the sample on Korean women in order to narrow down the scope of cultural analysis and show how each of them had a different relationship to their Korean heritage and culture. Such a comparison would not have been possible if I had chosen across a more diverse sample.

The basis for the age range from 30s to 40s reflects the research that TCKs often experience prolonged adolescence due to the many cultural contexts they must sort through as they make sense of their identities. This possibility of prolonged adolescence is not only a TCK phenomenon but also a national phenomenon in the U.S. as described earlier as emerging adulthood. The array of choices, extended professional training, graduate education, and job scarcity are a few of the reasons for this prolonged search for identity. In addition to emerging adulthood, research shows that people tend to narrate their lives with more nuanced and insightful autobiographical reasoning as

¹²⁶ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2013), 74.

¹²⁷ Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 265.

they age, up to midlife.¹²⁸ For example, a study asked adolescents (15-20), young adults (age 30-40), and older adults (age 60 and above), to provide personal occasions of when they had displayed wisdom in their lives. Young adults and older adults tended to articulate more examples of wisdom stories than adolescents in ways that connected to overarching life themes or philosophies.¹²⁹

Because I wanted to make accessible the wisdom of older TCKs for younger TCKs regarding identity making in intercultural spaces, I chose to interview young adults between ages 30 to 40.

Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner's research involved interviews with many older adults, so I wanted to prioritize the voices of young adult TCKs in my research.

The criterion of spending more than three years in at least two countries before the age of 18 reflects the phenomenon of interest--the lived experiences of identity formation for those who spent significant time in different countries during a developmentally sensitive and vulnerable time. While 'significant time' is highly subjective, I have chosen three years as the minimum amount of time needed to acclimate to a new host culture. The *minimum of three years* comes from an understanding of the time it usually takes to adjust to a new cultural or national environment. In *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, Lartey discusses a pattern that usually happens when adjusting to a new social, cultural, or national environment. The pattern consists of four phases: "(Phase 1) Encountering the system," "(Phase 2) Understanding the system," "(Phase 3) Living within the system," and "(Phase 4) Having (and using) authority within the system."¹³⁰ Encountering the system begins with initial culture shock, heightened emotional vulnerability, and feelings of helplessness. After the initial encounter, the stranger gradually gains an understanding of the new system in the second phase, beginning to discern the differences and similarities between their previous and new environments.

¹²⁸ Susan Bluck and Judith Glück, "Making Things Better and Learning a Lesson: Experiencing Wisdom across the Lifespan," *Journal of Personality* 72, no. 3 (2004): 569.

¹²⁹ McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*, 72.

¹³⁰ Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 8.

With increased understanding of the system, the stranger engages more deeply in the “customs and rituals of the culture,” such as adopting the host country’s holidays or sports teams.¹³¹ In the last phase of adjustment, the stranger becomes familiar enough with the host culture that she or he can fully navigate the system with knowledge and expertise. The time that it takes a person to experience these four phases will vary. In my own experience of living in more than eight countries, I would say that it takes at least three years and more to fully experience these four phases when adjusting to a new cultural and national environment. Therefore, I have set a minimum of three years as a criterion for finding research participants who have lived in two or more countries before the age of eighteen.

Setting and Location

To access my research participants, I identified a few representative participants from my personal connections and asked them to refer other participants who might also fit the criteria. I contacted these individuals via email invitation (Appendix A), asking if they would be interested in becoming a research participant. I also sent a preliminary screening form to make sure that they fit the criteria for the study (Appendix B).

The interviews were conducted in a private, closed-off space at Emory University for local participants and videochat for a participant in South Korea. Using videochat as a research tool has its advantages and shortcomings. Some of the advantages include easy and inexpensive access to participants and valuable data that may otherwise be left out from the study. Also, most young adult TCKs have already relied on this technology to stay connected across long distances, so it was not difficult to use for the participants. At the same time, videochat carries risk of a breach in confidentiality. Some of the nuanced facial expressions, emotions, and non-verbal cues may be

¹³¹ Ibid., 9.

missed through the screen, and unreliable internet may interrupt the flow of the interview. It might be more challenging to establish trust and rapport with the participant on-screen than face-to-face. At the same time, videochatting allows participants to stay in their own comfortable surroundings and may reduce anxiety by helping them feel as if the interview were an informal conversation with a friend rather than a formal research interview. With these advantages and challenges of videochat in mind, I chose to use both face-to-face interviews as well as videochat for my interviews, informing the participants of the risks of videochat in the informed consent form.

Interview Format

Before the interview, I sent the participants the informed consent forms and interview questions at least a week before our interview so that they knew what to expect. The interview was in an open-ended format so that if any of the study questions were not meaningful to them, the direction of the interview would move to fit their concerns and interests. I estimated the interviews to last about three hours, but I gave the participants the freedom to elaborate as much as they wanted as part of my post-colonial and feminist approach to let them decide how much they wanted to share. Each individual interview ended up being about three hours on average. The interview was semi-structured in that the first part of the interview asked the participant to give an overview of their life story within a given structure. I borrowed the structure and questions from Dan McAdam's Life Story Interview because the structure provided helpful boundaries for the participant to present their life stories clearly in a limited time. While the structure provided some guidelines, it seemed open and flexible enough for the storyteller to choose their content and organize it in whichever way

they wished. The interview prompts are as below. The parts in quotations are directly from McAdams' Life Story Interview.¹³²

Narrative Interview Guide

Part I. Life Chapters

“Please begin by thinking about your life as if it were a book or a novel.” What would be the title for this book?

Imagine that the book has a table of contents that breaks down your life story into chapters. What would be a name for each chapter?

In a few sentences, how would you summarize what each chapter is about?

Write a few words about how one chapter connects to the next. As a novelist, you are telling your life story in broad strokes through chapters. While there is no limit on the number of chapters, I suggest anywhere between two and seven. Our time for this section of the interview will be about 20 minutes, so please keep your chapter descriptions succinct.¹³³

¹³² Dan P. McAdams, "The Life Story Interview," accessed May 10, 2016. <https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/instruments/interview/>.

¹³³ Ibid.

The first part of the interview served as a lens for understanding how participants organized their life stories and whether their experiences living in different countries featured as significant life events that affected them.

The second part of the interview explored more in-depth in relation to their life chapters.

Part II

Now I would like to ask you some more specific questions about your experiences living in different countries.

What was your experience of moving from country to country?

When you think about the chapters of your life, did it make any difference that you were: [insert nationality]?

Did it make any difference that you were [gender]?

What role, if any, did [race] play in the chapters of your life?

What role, if any, did class play in the chapters of your life?

Tell me about faith in your life.

When you think about living in so many different countries, what are some positive or negative things that you experienced as the result of your international experiences?

How did you deal with these challenges or problems?

How do you think your experiences living in different countries impacted the way you view yourself, if at all?

Do you think it has shaped your personality in any way?

What would you say your greatest care needs were when you moved to a different country? Were your needs met and how so?

If your care needs were not met adequately, what forms of care would have been helpful?

How have you made sense of your identity and sense of belonging?

What role, if any, has your faith/religion/spirituality played in your search for identity or belonging?

Tell me about any role models in your life who have played an important role in helping you become who you are today. How are you like them? How are you different from them?

Having experienced what it's like to move from culture to culture, what wisdom would you pass onto other Korean American children and youth who are growing up in diverse cultural spaces?

What would you tell faith communities, mentors, pastors, or teachers who provide care with emerging TCKs?

The third part of the interview was a brief reflection on the interview process itself. I included this part to gauge the participants' emotional well-being as well as how the interview content or process might have better served their needs and experiences.

Part III

Reflection

I have asked you a lot of questions today. Thank you for sharing your answers. I just have one more question for you. What was it like for you to look back at your life and share your experiences today? What were your thoughts and feelings during the interview? How do you think this interview has affected you? Do you have any other comments about the interview process? Were there any questions that you think would have been helpful to ask?

The reflection part of the interview aimed to sharpen the data gathering process and data analysis to best suit the needs and concerns of Korean American women TCKs.

The Analysis

Following the interviews, I noted my initial impressions, themes that stood out, and moments during the interview that stirred strong emotions or reactions from the interviewee or myself. I kept in touch with the interview participants throughout the writing process and asked

questions over the phone and face to face as they were available. I also asked them to read my chapters for their feedback or corrections.

Limitations of the Research

There are several limitations to this research. My personal experiences and identity as a Korean TCK woman can result in overidentification, projection, or assumptions that may hinder a more critical approach to TCKs' stories.¹³⁴ My explicit motivations for this research to improve the identity formation experiences of minoritized TCKs through a postcolonial lens affects the way I converse with the interviewees and respond to positions that I might deem Eurocentric or colonizing. When I listened to some of the way I responded to their answers, I could sense deeper empathy at certain moments more than others, which can actually be repeating colonial silencing of another's story without truly listening. To address this limitation, I named my countertransference by writing it out and sorting out what was my issue and what was likely going on behind my strong reactions. Whenever possible, I tried to create a generous holding environment where I could most empathically represent the interviewees' perspectives. I also asked clarifying questions during and after the interview and invited their feedback at every stage of the writing process.

The small number of research participants in a narrative inquiry raise questions about the limitations of findings from so few people studied. However, I think that it is worth suspending the generalizability of this narrative inquiry to hear minoritized TCKs' stories that usually get buried under dominant discourse.

¹³⁴ Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE 2015), 91.

Chapter 3

In Her Own Words: Life Stories

This chapter presents the TCK participants' narrative identities given in the first portion of the interview. Participants were asked to think of their life as if it were a book or a novel and to create a title for the book. Then they were asked to imagine that the book had a table of contents that broke down their life story into chapters. They were invited to explain what each chapter was about and the organizing principle behind their narrative. This structure gave them a chance to be the author of their own stories and to choose whatever content they thought was most important to present in the order that they wanted. I was curious to see how they organized their life stories and what kinds of themes would emerge. The following data is a report of their life story "book" title, chapters, each person's organizing principle behind their chapters, and a life story summary according to how they described each chapter.

The following names are pseudonyms that the participants chose to be associated with their data. From a postcolonial perspective, the act of naming replays the drama of colonization when people's histories, identities, and lands were erased and replaced with colonizers' names and stories.¹³⁶ To resist this colonial dynamic, I wanted the women to have the power to choose their own names. They chose Sophia, Eirene, and Vera. Sophia chose her name because it means wisdom and because of her bucket list wish to visit the "majestic domes of the basilica in Istanbul."¹³⁷ Eirene picked her name because it means "true peace," and Vera chose her name because it means "faith" in Russian.

¹³⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London & New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1988), 157.

¹³⁷ Sophia, personal communication, December 20, 2016.

Name: Vera

Title: His-story of my life

Table of contents

Chapters	Age
1. My first world, very first years	0 to 6.5~7
2. New world, new people	6.5~7 to 12
3. Separation	12 to 18
4. Return	18 to 24
5. Another world, yet not so new	24-28
6. Young adulthood	28 – 31
7. Seminary	31-32

Vera's title, *His-story of my life*, shows her conviction that God is the co-author of her story. The major organizing principle in her novel was the shifts in locations she experienced, but also living apart from her mother.

Chapter 1 of Vera's life, "My first world, very first years," is about beginnings—her first friends in kindergarten, her first pet. Vera was born in Seoul, Korea. Her father became a senior pastor of a medium-sized church when she was three years old. Her memories of her first years in South Korea are "very warm," brimming with "a lot of love, a lot of attention."¹³⁸

Her transition from chapter one to chapter two is "sudden and abrupt." Chapter 2, "New world, new people," is about their move from South Korea to Russia as missionaries. From overhearing adults' conversations, Vera pieced together that her family was "going to this foreign place, very different, very cold place that is very far away."¹³⁹ She had heard stories from her grandfather that the Russians soldiers had robbed his department store during the Korean War. Then watching her family and church members cry about their imminent move, she could only guess that her family was going to a cold, big, and scary place. She was six and her younger sister was barely four years old when they moved.

At first, she was overwhelmed by the sheer size and expansiveness of everything in Russia: "The roads were huge and people were tall, you know? [laughs] And the buildings were so huge, so I was overwhelmed."¹⁴⁰ While Vera remembers being playful about the change at first, after a few days, she was looking at the vast expanse out her window, thinking, "Oh, perhaps if I go beyond that building, there would be my old neighborhood in Korea. Would my grandparents be there? Would my church and my friends be there?" I spent a few days just gazing out the window. I

¹³⁸ Vera, Interview by author, October 13, 2016.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

remember that.”¹⁴¹ This was the extent of Vera processing the permanence of her family’s move before she immersed herself completely in Russian culture. Her parents started a church, and Vera recalls the mutual love and appreciation between the new church members in Russia and her family: “I remember they loved us. And I remember them expressing a lot of gratitude to my parents. And I remember my parents really paid a lot of attention to them as well.”¹⁴²

At the same time, Vera expressed her own desperate need for attention and the lack thereof during that time of transition. While “I didn’t know it back then, now that I recall the incidences, I think I desperately sought attention deep inside.”¹⁴³ The “incidences” she refers to is her sudden hospitalization in first grade and fifth grade for an unknown illness. While she seemed to be well-adjusted in Russian school and speaking fluent Russian by her first year in first grade, she suddenly began to feel lingering aches in her limbs. Since her family was new to Russia and did not know how to navigate the healthcare system, they enlisted the help of a *Koryo-saram*.¹⁴⁴ Suddenly, an ambulance came and transported Vera to the hospital. At the hospital, the doctors also could not figure out what was wrong with her and put her in intensive care with other children who had terminal illnesses. Vera spent three weeks isolated in intensive care without access to her parents. She recalls being poked and prodded like a lab rat, receiving at least seven shots a day as they drew blood samples and once, even a sample from her bone marrow. In the end, they were never certain about what was wrong with her. After three weeks, she was released from the hospital.

Interestingly, her mystery pains did not end there. They came back when she was in fifth grade. Again, she went through the same ordeal in the hospital for three months. The only difference this time was that her parents had learned to navigate the healthcare system better by

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ *Koryo saram* is Korean to describe persons who migrated or were forced out to Manchuria and Siberia during the Japanese colonial period. They were practically Russians in terms of their social identities.

befriending the hospital staff with gifts and getting to visit their daughter. After three months of being hospitalized without any conclusive diagnoses or effective treatment, Vera was released. The mystery symptoms would revisit her from time to time especially during times of emotional duress.

Despite her mystery illness, Vera recounts her transition into Russian culture with gratitude and at times with bubbling excitement. Vera's family received warm hospitality from neighbors and congregation members. She loved being invited to their summer houses, where she would pick northern European berries and mushrooms, and play by the lake. At the playground, she was popular among the Russian children who were fascinated by their new neighbor who had a lot of toys. Within the struggling economic context of Russia at the time, her family was relatively wealthy in comparison, so Vera's toys attracted many of the Russian children to befriend her. The children would also offer Vera little gifts, like books or Lenin or Stalin badges. In no time, she was accepted into their fold as "one of them."

But like all acculturation processes, Vera also tells of hardships, like the time her family was targeted for robbery. They had just bought a new car, but the following morning, they found it stripped to the point where even the tires and windshield wipers were stolen. "That was 1991 Russia," Vera said with a shrug and laughter. "But our neighbors were really upset with us and helped us to call the police. I think their support really helped my parents get through those hard times."¹⁴⁵ While her family's adjustment in Russia had its ups and downs, the love and hospitality from her Russian neighbors and congregation members made the transition much easier.

In Chapter 3, "Separation," Vera faces a major transition in her family due to her mother's illness. By the beginning of her seventh-grade year, the Russian hospital declared that her mother was going to die in a few weeks. Her family rushed back to Korea to care for her mother's deteriorating condition. Vera's father sought ways for all of them to stay together in Korea as her

¹⁴⁵ Vera, Interview by author, October 13, 2016.

mother received treatment. After several, painful months of prayerful deliberation, Vera's father made the difficult decision to go back to Russia with the rest of the family. By that time, her mother's condition stabilized, but she still needed medical care in Korea. This began a long separation between Vera's family and her mother.

Because of limited communication technology back in 1997, her mother would call them once in every few days and fax them letters. She would also send big packages of Korean food every month, which Vera recalls with happiness. Vera seems to have adjusted well on the most part without her mom back in Russia: "I was not really sad about being separated from my mom. I don't know why. Because my mom was very sacrificial. She's [...] very loving, very [...] cheerful person. So I'm not sure why I wasn't very sad. Also, I was happy to be back in Russia."¹⁴⁶ Vera felt relieved that her mother was getting better, *and* she was glad to be back in Russia. She remembers being well-taken care of by her church members, who took her under their wings and cared for her like a mother during this time.

There was one incident, however, when she deeply felt the impact of her mother's absence. Vera's father had to go back to Korea for about two weeks, so she and her sister were alone in Russia. She was thirteen and her sister ten years old at the time. A lady came to clean and cook for them every other day, but her sister came down with the chicken pox on a day when the lady was not there. While her sister was ill, Vera had no way to reach her parents in Korea. They had recently moved, so things were not yet organized, and keeping track of phone numbers was not her father's forte. Without knowing who to contact and scared for her sister's life, Vera felt her mother's absence deeply for the first time:

We were just too young. I had to be her mom and dad, and she was sick! That's the first time [starts crying] I don't know why I'm crying now. I never thought about it before. [...] Before then, I was really numb about my

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

mom being sick, but when my sister got sick, she's under my responsibility. That was the first time I really felt the sadness of being alone. Yeah, this is really ungrateful of me to think that I was alone. There were so many people who were caring for me then, but I thought I was alone. [stifling sobs] I'm sorry!¹⁴⁷

She is apologetic about her tears. Whenever she names hard or difficult times in her life, she tends to apologize and blame her own shortcomings for negative emotions. For example, she comments on her own lack of gratitude for feeling like she had no one during her sister's illness. She feels that she had so much support and love during that time, so saying that she felt alone feels like she is being ungrateful for all that she had. She cries silently and shifts the subject quickly:

I'm sorry! [laughs through tears] My sister recovered quickly. I got in touch with my parents through a family friend, and my dad took care of everything from then on out, so I didn't have to care for her from then, but... [suppresses her sobs and tries to laugh it off] I'm sorry!"

Her emotions run deep. However, Vera quickly resolves the story of her sister's illness and describes what it was like for her to be separated from her mother for about six years, from age twelve to eighteen. Her father did everything he could as a parent in her mother's absence, taking care of all the chores and cooking for them with the help of a domestic worker. But because he had so much on his plate at the time, he did not take the time to sit and have deep conversations with his adolescent daughter. Since Vera was such a good girl who never caused trouble, her parents thought that she had a quiet puberty--"almost no puberty."¹⁴⁸ But Vera said that she internalized everything by retreating inward and quietly pulling away. For example, she no longer hung out as much with her Russian friends. If chapter two of her life was about accepting and adjusting to everything quickly in Russia, Vera says that chapter three was about "pushing everything out."¹⁴⁹ She carried on a "normal" school life and maintained friendships to a certain point, but she was more playful and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

free with her sister at home. She grew increasingly introverted, preferring to read, listen to music, play piano, or walk around the city by herself.

When Vera was in ninth grade, her family went back to Korea for her dad's sabbatical. Vera enrolled in a Korean school for about three months, where she struggled to understand a curriculum that was entirely in Korean. The material seemed familiar to her, but since it was in another language, she struggled to grasp the material. This was a difficult adjustment for her, since she had been a very good student back in Russia. When Vera's father decided to return to Russia after their sabbatical, Vera was happy to go back with him. But she experienced another separation from her younger sister, who stayed behind in Korea. Her parents decided that it would be best for her younger sister to be with her mother in Korea. This decision was hard on Vera and her sister:

I remember my sister crying, you know? Because she didn't want to stay in Korea. But my parents thought they knew better. They made the decision for us. [...] I was happy to go back to Russia, however strange that might sound. I was apart from my mom. But I was happy to be going back. [...] But I felt bad about leaving my sister behind. It was more difficult to say goodbye to my sister than my mom. All the way to the airport, my sister was crying the whole time.¹⁵⁰

After this tearful separation, Vera returned to Russia with her father to finish high school. Toward the end of her high school years, Vera began to sense that she was different from many of her peers. For example, she could not identify with the group of Korean international students or with the children of workers from companies like Samsung or Hyundai. While she spoke good Korean and knew Korean customs, she did not share in their contemporary Korean cultural interests. She identified more with Russian culture and its language and customs, but it was complicated because of institutional reminders that she was a foreigner:

No matter how much I felt it was my home, the system itself kept reminding me that I'm a foreigner because like every three months, we had to go either into Finland or Estonia or somewhere to renew our visas. And when I was little, I was just one of the children with all the other Russians, but now that I was in tenth or eleventh grade, Russians would ask me, "Where are you from?"¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Although Vera never personally experienced racist hate crimes, there were also Neo-Nazis or “skinheads,” who targeted foreigners. Initially, the Neo-Nazis targeted Muslims from Central Asia and then Koreans who stood out as foreigners. Every Korean man at Vera’s church had been physically assaulted at one point or another:

[The skinheads] would hit them to the point that some were even hospitalized. There were Korean pastors in Moscow who were killed. I have heard of Korean missionaries in Moscow [who were killed] because Moscow was worse. There was an MK in Moscow who was a good friend of mine. He was hospitalized two times because [he was] hit by skinheads. And Korean guys were all hit or slapped. [The skinheads] would chase them, curse at them to go back to their country, like that.¹⁵²

Racist hate crimes, microaggressions, and the government’s structures consistently categorized Vera as a foreigner, yet Vera loved Russia and considered it home. It was hard, therefore, when her father strongly urged her to go to college in Korea to maintain her Korean connections, heritage and language. Vera hated the idea of going back but did not express this directly. When she overheard her father’s friend say to her father, “Isn’t that kind of cruel to send her to Korea?” the phrase “cruel” stuck with her for years. She tried to persuade her father not to send her to Korea by telling him that it was “cruel” to send her back to Korea. But she said it half-jokingly, softening her real emotions about the matter. When her father did not budge, she asked about the possibility of applying to colleges in the U.S, but her father remained resolute about her going to college in Korea.

Her tearful journey back to Korea sets the opening scene of chapter 4, “Return.” Vera’s own words best express what it was like for her to “return” home:

Vera: I went back to Korea, and I was bitter. My first time in my life, I hated going back. I was crying. [...] I cried a lot before going back to Korea and cried a lot during my flight to Korea. I was alone on that flight.

¹⁵² Ibid.

- Interviewer: Ah, that's hard.
- Vera: Yeah, and after I got off the plane, I also went home alone. No one came to see me. I was just this big girl. I could do this alone. So I was just going home, but I cried 'cuz I missed Russia. Not that Korea was bad, but Korea was foreign to me. Then I went to college, and it was another culture shock because it was in a rural area. (laughs) Like now they have these rural accents that are completely foreign to me. And I don't know why, I sincerely don't know why, but people didn't think of me as Korean. [...] On the train, I asked a question to the passenger next to me, and they were like, "Oh, do you speak Korean?" I'm like, "I'm Korean." They were like, (gasp)! This lady, she thought I was a foreigner. I don't know why. I hadn't even dyed my hair back then. Maybe it was my Russian clothes? (laughs)¹⁵³

Returning home was lonely and painful, but no one seemed to know or anticipate how emotionally taxing this transition would be for her. At least she now looked like the majority in Korea, but she was shocked to find that people in Korea perceived her as somewhat "different." For example, when she spoke to strangers, people would be surprised that she was Korean.

In college, she tried to fit in at first with the Koreans who were born and raised in Korea, but her college small group nicknamed her "Russian." While they did not do this to make fun of her in any way, Vera did not appreciate being labeled this way because of her long history of being labeled a foreigner:

I remember being a bit bitter about it after four years because [...] I'm Korean, and now I'm here in Korea, and they're calling me Russian. When I was in Russia, internally I wanted to be part of that culture because I grew up in it. But as I grew older, I sensed that I was a foreigner. I was a perpetual foreigner. Maybe if I was white, that would make a difference. But since I was Asian and looked different, I was a foreigner. As I was saying earlier, the system itself labeled us as foreigners. For example, foreigners' license plates were a different color. Russians were white, and we were yellow [...] so the police could catch us more easily and take money from us. [...]

The system kept communicating to me that you're different. You need to get your visas renewed. [...]

So when I went to Korea, officially I was Korean, right? I had a Korean passport. But once I was in, people were asking me whether I was Korean and calling me "Russian."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

In Russia, she was labeled as a foreigner because of her race and passport. In Korea, Vera was a citizen, but she also felt the cultural gap in Korean shared humor and collective memories.

Even our humor was different. They [Koreans] would all crack up with *Gag Concert* or *Oot-Chat-Sah*¹⁵⁵, but I could not find anything funny in those. But I laugh a lot watching Russian comedy or even BBC. I'm not trying to be arrogant, but I'm just saying that kind of [Korean] comedy felt silly to me. [...]

In college, students would find some kind of common theme in conversations, perhaps from high school or from even further down the road that specific culture they shared as Korean kids growing up in Korea and I had none of that. I could learn while listening to them, but I'm observing and learning as an outsider, not as an insider. That spoke to me that perhaps I don't quite belong here as my father expected me to.¹⁵⁶

These feelings of non-belonging prompted her to search for ways to leave Korea, and studying abroad provided a promising way out.

Chapter five, "Another world, yet not so new," is about her new life as a Ph.D. student in the U.S. Adjusting to life in the U.S. was not too difficult for her, as she was familiar with American culture from her friends and teachers at her international school in Russia. Besides, she was truly a foreigner in the U.S., so people perceiving her as a foreigner was not a big deal:

[The transition] was easy because I'm a foreigner! And I ought to be a foreigner here. Being a foreigner here is not difficult. [...] In Korea, I'm a citizen. I have a right to Korean whatever [laughs] but I'm not getting it. So when I was in the U.S., my roommates were Koreans who had lived overseas for a long time. So we communicated well with each other. All those subtle differences were well acknowledged and well accepted. So that was okay. So I'm grateful for the relationships and the people that I met in Iowa.¹⁵⁷

Interestingly, Vera felt more comfortable being designated as a foreigner in the U.S. because at least in the U.S., she had no expectations of making it her home or having rights to claim as a citizen.

Having a supportive community with her roommates, who listened, shared, and acknowledged her experiences helped create a smoother transition to the U.S.

Vera began to make a different kind of transition in her faith as she served as a college small group leader at church. She grew to love teaching and exploring the bible much more than teaching in the area of her doctoral studies in political science. While political science was interesting, she felt

¹⁵⁵ *Gag Concert* or *Oot-Chat-Sah* are popular Korean comedy shows.

¹⁵⁶ Vera, Interview by author, October 13, 2016.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

limited because of her desire to engage theologically with the subject matter in ways that aligned with her faith convictions. Gradually, her waning interest in political science led her away from finishing her dissertation to exploring a government position in Korea. When she landed a prestigious government position in Korea, she moved to Korea to begin a new chapter in her life called, “Young Adulthood.”

Vera worked for the Korean government from ages 28 to 31. While her new job came with high recognition and prestige, she found it hard to adjust to the bureaucracy and hierarchy. Obeying orders from higher up places without question and fitting into a system that ran only on self-interest grated against her core values. For example, when she and her Christian colleagues created policy proposals that promoted cooperation and not simply self-interest, their proposals never saw the light of day. Even though Vera knew that this was the way things worked in the world, she began to question whether she really wanted to devote her whole life to that system. While she was questioning her commitment to the government position, Vera became more involved at her church. After work and on weekends, she would spend time at church worshiping and serving in a young adult community with intellectual challenges. Being with these young adults offered an environment that was in stark contrast to the cutthroat, competitive environment at her work. The young adults had the intellectual capacity of children, but Vera learned so much from their love:

I received so much love and learned a lot. I was reminded of who I am and where I need to be. There I felt something different from my busy career life, [which] was all about competition, getting the job done. I was busy traveling and going to so many meetings. [...] Appearances were very important. We were having a lot of guests from Central Asia and Russia, and our organization was representing Korea. So we attended carefully to how we presented ourselves, and I got sick and tired of it. [laughs]¹⁵⁸

Vera grew tired of what felt like a charade. For example, she felt sick of presenting a pleasant, political façade in posh, luxurious meetings talking about what was in the interest of both countries

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

while hiding her Christian identity and her concern for the persecution of Christians happening right under their noses in certain countries. No one cared about her appeals to help the people being persecuted. She grew frustrated with feeling like she had to compromise the integrity of her faith at her work and immersed herself into her church community:

I became more and more deeply involved at church. I found my new identity at church. It doesn't matter that I don't belong anywhere. I belong to the church. I belong with God. I belong to this community of the body of Christ. And the body of Christ doesn't have to be in Korea. It can be anywhere.

Two years into her career, Vera was at a crossroads. She was offered a job at the UN, but after a long and prayerful discernment, she declined the UN position and decided to enroll in seminary.

Vera's final chapter is about her current life at a mainline seminary in the U.S. The three overlapping themes in this chapter are regret, hope, and gratitude. She feels grateful for her new community at seminary, new church, and new relationships. But she still struggles with regret when she misses her family or looks back on her career decisions or relationships that she chose or let go. Vera believes that the regrets surface most strongly when she is navel gazing more than trusting in God:

The regrets creep in when I'm very much into myself. Not really in my relationship with God, just like looking at myself, like looking at my reality. Then those regrets kick in. But when I'm with God, I mean, God is always with me, but it's just when [...] I'm communicating with Him through Scripture and prayer and meditation. Although I don't know what lies ahead of me, I'm confident that God working in my life, that He has plans, so although I can't quite completely grasp why I'm here at this seminary, I'm sure God will make the best out of it if I stay in Him and He in me. That's the hope aspect.

Likewise, Vera is still working out her doubts, regrets and trusting in hope that God is writing God's story in her life in ways that she has yet to fully understand.

Name: Sophia

Title: My Mosaic Life

Table of contents

Chapters	Age
1. "... It's not funny, dad."	0 to 4
2. Firecrackers, driving out evil spirits	5 to 7
3. "Best Girl," three years in a row	8 to 10
4. "I don't belong anywhere"	11-17
5. "Who am I really?"	18 to 24
6. Piecing things together	26 to present

Sophia's chapters were organized according to the key thoughts, emotions, and impressions at different stages of her life. The broad outline of her story reveals a search for identity and belonging and concludes with the image of a mosaic. She is putting together the different pieces of her life into a mosaic that is always expanding and changing.

Sophia's first chapter, "... It's not funny, dad," is about her dad playing pranks on her by hiding from her in public places, especially in new places. Her earliest memory of her childhood is of

when she was three years old on a hiking trail with her dad, when he hid behind some trees and took a picture of her crying and running down the trail searching for her father. Even after all these years, when she looks at the picture she can remember exactly what she was feeling because the incident was so traumatic for her. Because she was a curious child who would often wander off, her father had wanted to scare her from wandering off by herself. The pranks, however, left her feeling abandoned and confused as to why she was left alone. She would ask herself, “Did I do something wrong? Did I act in ways that displeased him? Why am I alone right now?”¹⁵⁹ She also felt afraid, wondering when her dad would leave her again or how she could survive on her own (at age three or four). She was left with the impression that she should not trust anyone or that she should be totally self-sufficient since she could be left somewhere without any one to count on.

Chapter 2, “Firecrackers, driving out evil spirits” is about her father’s mission work and living in different cultures. In Malaysia, every new year the locals would set off tons of firecrackers as a way of driving evil spirits. When the loud explosions and smoke-filled streets would scare Sophia, her father would explain that they, as Christian missionaries, were there to stop such demonic rituals and to help them realize that there was something greater than loud noises to scare the evil spirits away. While the locals were setting off firecrackers to drive out the evil spirits, her father was metaphorically setting off firecrackers in his own way by doing explosive things to “drive out evil spirits” and bring about change wherever he went. Sophia recalls that her father was neither subtle nor gentle in the way he handled situations that he deemed to be wrong:

His strong moral compass would not let him budge away from topics and situations he felt needed correction. Instead of doing things in a calm, methodical way, it was emotionally “explosive” and always seemed rushed. Things have to change or be corrected *right now*.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Sophia, personal communication, August 26, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

The loud, explosive firecrackers remind Sophia of the way her father worked in the different cultures.

Chapter 3, is about Sophia being given the Best Girl Award three years in a row at a wealthy, private Chinese Christian school in the Philippines. The Best Girl and Boy Award was given by the teacher to one girl and one boy in the class who excelled academically and demonstrated excellent character. Although Sophia had just moved to the Philippines and was not Chinese, she did everything in her power to “pass” as one of them and managed to receive the Best Girl Award three years in a row. She was also voted class president for all three years. Her mother thought this was strange because the daughter that she saw at home was not the girl who was winning these awards and getting voted to be class president each year. At home, Sophia was rebellious and non-compliant. But at school, Sophia presented an outer persona who was studious, diligent, and pleasant. Even at first grade, she knew that this was the only way to survive and thrive in her new environment. She did not feel that she would be fully loved and accepted if she didn’t perform and put on this persona. For example, she was the only Korean in a largely Chinese student body, but she drove herself to the ground trying to learn Chinese:

I struggled with Chinese cuz, you know, no one in my family spoke it. And having to like memorize Bible verses in Chinese, book reports in Chinese, was really hard. But this inner drive to be the best, really like, even when I’m like really young, in tears every night cuz no one can help me with my homework. With Chinese. And still getting like, you know they rank us. So getting like number two or number three every semester even in Chinese classes. I mean I don’t know how I did it. It was—I still don’t know how. But it happened. [...] This like having to succeed and be on my own was so strong.¹⁶¹

Whereas she could work hard and pass as one of the highly performing Chinese students at her private school in the Philippines, Sophia experienced a rude awakening when she moved to the U.S. She appropriately named chapter 4 of her life, “I don’t belong anywhere.” In Malaysia, Singapore, or

¹⁶¹ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

the Philippines, Sophia had always been part of the racial majority of Asians. Moreover, she had watched her parents help indigenous populations who were often darker-skinned, so at a young age, she inferred that light skin was better, richer, more powerful, and able to give. She felt like she belonged to the elite group of Chinese people.

When Sophia moved to the U.S., however, her worldview broke down. No longer was she part of the elite majority. She and another boy in her class were the only Asians at her predominantly white school. Her family experienced a drastic drop in their income as they no longer had the generous financial support they had as missionaries in the Philippines. Having never experienced any lack in her life, the sudden changes left her confused, angry, and depressed:

Looking back, now, I think I was close to suicidal in my teenage years because this not feeling like I belonged anywhere and then the typical high school drama between friends left me really isolated. [...] [When we moved to the U.S.,] I think the first two years was more like the novelty and the shock and adjusting. And then realizing, ‘Wow, this really sucks.’ And then diving into ‘No one really understands,’ or ‘We can’t, my family can’t have a conversation about the anxiety that we’re all feeling.’ [...] I became kind of, well, in therapy terms the *identified patient*. Acting out all of my family’s anxiety.¹⁶²

Sophia’s anger and depression, aggravated by unresolved anxiety within her family, showed up in volatile emotional exchanges with her father. She resented the pressure he put on her about how she was to plan her life (at age thirteen) and be financially responsible for her college education. He was acting out on his own anxiety and financial insecurity, while Sophia’s rebellious outbursts were a cry for help and understanding. But no one in her family had the space and insight to acknowledge her feelings and empathize with her suffering at the time.

Going off to college helped Sophia begin a new chapter in her life where she felt free to explore who she was away from the pressures of family or her role as a pastor’s kid. She named this chapter, “Who am I, really?” as she began to explore new artistic, intellectual, spiritual, and relational

¹⁶² Ibid.

pursuits. For example, she took up ballroom dancing and art classes. She also began to discover her unique voice in the classroom. She recalls a significant moment in her Art Theory class during her senior year when she ventured out on an unconventional topic for her final project.

It was a small class of 5 students. The rest of the students chose recognizable monuments from around the world, while I chose to focus on the DMZ. I wanted to study and see that space as a monument and symbol for the brokenness between the two countries. The stark contrast in architecture between the north and south buildings, the plethora of beautiful wildlife that have reclaimed the untouched areas of land and the soldiers who externally looked the same and belonged to the same ethnic group, but stood as enemies, all these layers fascinated me. While the topic was completely unorthodox and may even be unfitting for the assignment, my professor and the other students in class joined me in my interest. I think the DMZ reflected my own internal tensions as different cultures pulled at me. There is also the beauty I sought to find as I allow my true self to blossom naturally as I step away from expectations and burdens others have placed on me and enter into freedom.¹⁶³

Sharing her unique perspectives with a class that heard and valued her point of view felt empowering for Sophia. As she discovered that people genuinely liked her and spoke well of her, she began to see her own worth. Before college, she wasn't sure if people loved her out of obligation or because she was someone's daughter. But in college she felt free to love and be loved by the people around her for who she was. Her depression and feelings of worthlessness began to lift.

She also became a leader in her college Christian fellowship, where she took up the guitar. She enjoyed leading worship and building relationships with people who were on similar journeys of faith and self-discovery.

After college, her blossoming identity took a hiatus when she got into an abusive relationship in seminary that lasted for three and a half years. Sophia believes that she stayed so long in that abusive relationship because she had become weary of being self-sufficient. It took so much effort and energy to figure things out on her own, which she had done all her life. Moreover, she had always been the giver/helper in most of her friendships, so she wanted to rest and have someone else take over for her even if that person was controlling and abusive. The relationship,

¹⁶³ Ibid.

though it was isolating, met her needs for belonging and dependence on someone else to care for her and make the decisions.

Sophia's final chapter, "Piecing things together," is about her life after she got out of the abusive relationship and began to hear her own voice again. Reflecting on her past, she started to draw important threads from her life together and envisioned her life story as a mosaic of some sort:

Perhaps it's a colorful stained-glass window with God as the light shining through. Each piece of glass reflecting a different part of my past, a different location, a different story... As for the future, I really don't know what to think. Perhaps the image of the stain glass is limiting because it suggests a stiff, permanent picture, while I feel my picture is constantly growing and changing, never complete, but always being added to.¹⁶⁴

She also resonated with Homi Bhabha's poem, which articulates the different pieces that make up one's identity in postcolonial spaces:

"Memory says: What to do right? Don't count on me.
 I'm a canal in Europe where bodies are floating
 I'm a mass grave I'm the life that returns
 I'm a table set with room for the Stranger
 I'm a field with corners left for the landless
 I'm a man-child praising God he's a man
 I'm a woman who sells for a boat ticket

 I'm an immigrant tailor who says *A coat*
 is not a piece of cloth only

 I have dreamed of Zion I've dreamed of world revolution
 I have dreamed that my children could live at last like others
 I'm a corpse dredged from a canal in Berlin
 A river in Mississippi
 I'm a woman standing
 I am standing here in your poem. Unsatisfied
 -- from Atlas of a Difficult World: Poems 1988-1991¹⁶⁵

In response, Sophia wrote her own poem that reflected her own story/ies.

Who am I?

I'm a recording device that holds within countless stories of suffering.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, xix.

I'm a car that drives to three different locations in one day.
 I'm a stranger in the place they tell me I belong.
 I'm an eager toddler, taking in everything, wanting to get everything right.
 I'm an old woman, having seen and heard tales of generations.
 I'm a wanderer going back and forth- where do I go next?
 I'm sitting in traffic, not moving, but speeding through life.
 I am standing, ready to be heard and known
 I am alive
 I am.¹⁶⁶

Name: Eirene

Title: Home

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Chapters	Age
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6. Home as community	28-31
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¹⁶⁶ Sophia, Personal communication, August 26, 2017.

Eirene organized her life chapters by remembered impressions from periods that stood out in her life. She noticed that each defining period of her life is marked by a lack of something. For example, her earliest years are marked by a lack of parental presence and sense of safety and permanence. From age two, she lived with her grandparents outside of Seoul, while her father finished seminary and her mother worked full-time in Seoul. She would get to see her parents only three or four times a year, two or three days at a time. She felt old beyond her years: “There was this feeling that I am already old as I will ever get. There's this feeling that I might – like I know everything that I need to know at seven, eight, nine years old.” As such, Eirene had a lot of things on her mind. She longed for the day when she would permanently be with her parents, but she wondered if that day would ever come. She also felt anxious and insecure about what would happen if her grandparents grew old and died. Her upbringing in a conservative evangelical church added an apocalyptic gloom over her thoughts so that nothing felt permanent or safe. Jesus could come back at any moment, and “present sources of safety would not always be available.” A sense of uncertainty and impermanence hangs over her first chapter.

In chapter two, “Home as place (with a house),” Eirene is nine and living in Indonesia with her family. While she now has a traditional, nuclear family, she still lacks a “sense of place-ness and a sense of nation-ness” because she is living in a foreign country. They also move three times during the five years they stayed in Indonesia, so Eirene wishes that someday she can claim a place to call her country and her permanent home.

In chapter three, “Home as heaven,” Eirene moves to the U.S. for her junior high and high school years. For seven years, Eirene’s family goes through the process of applying for permanent residency and citizenship. They feel “nation-less” since they no longer feel at home in Korea or

Indonesia or the U.S. Her father draws on scripture to describe that their home was in heaven and that they were citizens of the kingdom of God.

In her college years, Eirene begins to feel some agency in her life. Thus she named this chapter of her life, “Home as my making.” In college, she finds a sense of belonging in a tight group of friends at her college fellowship. During her junior high and high school years, Eirene did not have a strong group of friends, but in college she met many other Korean or Korean Americans and grew close to them through a deeper involvement at church. There she also began to develop a spiritual identity grounded in Reformed theology. While she had found good friends and a vibrant spiritual community, she still felt something missing. Now she no longer felt quite at home with her own family. Going back home to her family felt temporary, like a vacation home because she only went home while school was out. She also began to feel deficient about herself as her grades went from A’s and B’s in high school to C’s and D’s at her Ivy League university. She questioned not only her academic performance but every other part of her life, constantly asking herself “Will I be a failure? Am I failing in my grades? Am I adequate?”

After graduating, she studied at a mainline seminary for two years before relocating to work in Korea for two years. This chapter title is “Home is wherever God is.” In seminary, she began to question everything:

Those were the years when I moved around on my own and the first two years in seminary was years of questioning, questioning my conviction and commitment, of the future, my capability and capacity. It was a very angsty period.¹⁶⁷

Then she went to Korea and developed a firmer sense of her Korean identity and of herself as an adult with more agency. She also found that she loved teaching and felt happy. But when she returned to the U.S., she spent the loneliest two years of her life. All her seminary friends had

¹⁶⁷ Eirene, Interview by author, October 26, 2016.

graduated and moved away, and her parents had left the U.S. to go back to Indonesia. During those two years, she focused on pastoral counseling, taking a lot of pastoral counseling classes and interning at a psychiatric hospital. After graduating seminary, she did a full-time clinical pastoral residency for a year. She named this chapter, “Home is wherever God is” because she felt as if God were already at work wherever she was planning to be or wherever she ended up:

God was already there and working and beckoning me to join, “You don’t need to fear.” God is telling me, “I’m already back in the U.S. You’re just coming where I am and I’m already working there. I’m already there.” When I’m working as a chaplain, God is already in that hospital patient’s room or in that patient’s life. I’m just going there and finding God working there and seeing that and witnessing it. That’s what I thought about home.¹⁶⁸

Switching her framework to join God who was already at work helped relieve some of her anxiety and self-doubt. Moreover, the two years that she spent in Korea helped her feel more empowered and capable because she was able to develop a stronger sense of who she was—her ethnic heritage, her teaching gifts, and control over her life choices. Yet being back in the U.S. without her family or a solid community made her feel like she was living in a metaphorical “black hole”:

I felt like I was somehow in a monastic dungeon looking up at the leafless trees. That was a period when I took all these photos of leafless trees in October and November around the seminary. Oh man, I developed those photographs, too. I still have them.¹⁶⁹

At the end of her clinical pastoral education, Eirene’s father suffered a major stroke in Indonesia, which left their family with a long and difficult road toward recovery. Eirene went back to Indonesia to be with her family. While caring for her father, Eirene developed a different definition of home:

[This] chapter is “Home as community.” To be more precise, home as community of companions in time of need, and it’s that home that exists not in a certain person but in the empty space that is made between and among persons when the community congregates, and especially when the community forms around the weak and the sick, as in my dad.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

So home is that—it's not perfect, but it's the relationship and the space that forms in that empty space when people congregate. [...] It doesn't have to be mom and dad. It doesn't have to be friends. It doesn't have to be certain people, but it is people with the kind of intention, a certain kind of intention to be together in support and care, and that tends to happen when one person in the community is weak or sick and people gather around. And that gives the community some kind of solidarity.¹⁷⁰

Experiencing her father's illness changed Eirene's idea of home from a place or family to the space and relationships that are formed when people come together in solidarity to protect and serve those who are vulnerable.

Even though the road to recovery was slow and hard, Eirene rediscovered her love for teaching as she taught elementary, junior high, and college students in Indonesia. She also realized that "time does go on and that it does heal certain things."¹⁷¹ However, this glimmer of hope was accompanied by the loss of a father figure or a dependable authority. In addition, disappointing experiences with family friends and missionaries taught her that "human beings are not inherently good or trustworthy" or "dependable."¹⁷² She became very critical. Spiritually, she began to feel God's absence. She could assent to the presence of God intellectually, but she no longer felt "that charismatic sense of the presence that I could feel in my heart sort of way."¹⁷³

After staying in Indonesia with her family for three years, Eirene moved back to Korea. While she would still go back and forth to Indonesia to visit, her move to Korea felt like a closing or departure. She titled this chapter, "Leaving home." There were several layers to her leaving:

So leaving in multiple sense. Leaving Indonesia, leaving parental authority, leaving a pastoral home, leaving spiritual home. As you know I finished the pastoral ministry, the children's ministry last year and didn't go back to church, the regular ministry work. So it feels like leaving, and throughout this PhD, MA and PhD work that I'm doing, there's a more rigorous sense of deconstruction, work of deconstruction going on than I had ever done back in seminary. So digging into philosophies and interacting with non-Christians more than ever before. I realized that until this period I hadn't really interacted a lot with non-Christians ever in my life, but this is when I am starting to interact with non-Christians and looking at things from not necessarily a faith perspective and I like that place of border, that border place between secular and sacred. I don't necessarily want to go back

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

to where I was within the church walls, but at the same time I'm not really leaving. So now I have perhaps a more stable ego enough to withstand more challenge.

In this phase of her life, Eirene begins her PhD in Education and engages in intense deconstruction of her faith and beliefs. She leaves church ministry and is no longer affiliated with a church community, although she visits different churches sometimes. She no longer feels a sense of obligation about “should” and “don'ts”. In this period of her life, she lacks certainty in other areas of her life, like job security after graduation, uncertainty about her faith or vocation. She describes this phase as a puzzle:

I'm not really thinking much either. I'm just living and busy working and writing reports that I don't believe in, but I have to do it anyway because they're paying me to do it.... Yeah. But I'm exchanging my soul for money, but okay, fine. I will finish it as soon as I can and then I will move on to writing my dissertation, whatever I believe in, whatever it is. I don't know what that is.

The current chapter of Eirene's life has many loose threads, and the direction of her story is mixed with cynicism and uncertainty but with enough agency to pursue her own interests.

Emerging themes

Three themes emerged throughout all three narratives: 1) **performance pressure**, 2) **loneliness and nonbelonging**, and 3) **faith and church community as greatest sources of identity formation and belonging**.

Performance Pressure

The theme of performance pressure came up in each of their stories when they were adjusting to a new country. Even though they were very young at the time of their move, they put immense pressure on themselves to integrate into the new cultures. Each person's grit and determination came through in their narratives.

Vera, for example, shared how she submerged herself into Russian culture when she first moved there: “I strove to make my accent as perfect as possible. Can you imagine? A seven-year old kid. I was practicing the pronunciation, “Err” so that I could talk like a Russian kid.” Vera’s efforts paid off as she was speaking fluent Russian within the year. While she seemed to be adjusting fine in her parents’ eyes, Vera suffered a mystery illness that led to repeated hospitalizations and symptoms that returned later in life when she was under severe stress. Vera’s case suggests that TCK children may demonstrate incredible determination, perseverance, and self-imposed pressure to perform and adapt in a new environment. But like Vera’s parents, adults and caregivers of TCK children and youth may not detect their inner cries for attention and care because TCK children may not be able to articulate their pain in words. In Vera’s case, her pain became expressed through psychosomatic symptoms.

Sophia’s story shows a similar pattern of performance for survival. She developed an outer persona that fit the “Best Girl” Award at her private Chinese school in the Philippines and managed to be voted class president and Best Girl for three years in a row. Her mother would say, “If only they saw you at home, they would never have given you this award.”¹⁷⁴ Her mother’s comment reflected the disconnect from the outer persona Sophia was creating at school and the persona that she showed only at home. Sophia said,

Outwardly, I was very studious, diligent, really good and trying to meet people’s expectations. But within the home or within me I was very rebellious. [...] I think that was one way to survive and thrive. [...] Because if I don’t have this outer mask or persona, then I wasn’t sure I would be supported. I wasn’t sure if I would be fully accepted and loved. And so I put on this best girl, kind of like, everyone loves me, right? To have this personality of a very pleasant, very compliant person to others. And smart, funny, all these things.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Sophia, Interview by author, October 26, 2016.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Sophia's driven performance and dazzling outer persona was her way of securing love, acceptance, and a place in a foreign environment. The performance pressure persisted into high school even as she sank into loneliness, depression, and suicidal thoughts:

I was incredibly depressed. Looking back now, I think I was close to suicidal in my teenage years because this not feeling like I belonged anywhere and then the typical high school drama between friends left me really isolated. And so if it wasn't for this [idea that], I have to survive and make it through and prove everyone wrong, [...] that was the only drive that kept me going. And all my teachers saying, 'You have a bright future. You can do anything you want.' Because you know, I was getting good grades and doing well. If it weren't for those things—that drive and encouragement—then [...] I think I would have really sunk lower into my depression.¹⁷⁶

What is striking about this anecdote is that even though Sophia was incredibly lonely, depressed, and close to suicidal, none of her teachers took notice. They only noticed how well she was performing in school as a measurement of her wellbeing. Not surprisingly, Sophia held onto her academic performance to survive through a dark and turbulent adolescence. But during a powerful moment in the interview, Sophia recognized why the performance pressure might have driven her into an abusive relationship that lasted for three and a half years. She had always been puzzled by her decision to stay in that abusive relationship for so long, but as she was talking about her relentless effort to secure success through performance and self-sufficiency, it dawned on her that perhaps she might have been exhausted and needed an escape:

I realize that's a choice I made to stay in a relationship where my voice was taken away. And the reason why I did that is because maybe I was so tired of being self-sufficient. I just—it's so nice to have someone just decide everything and take care of me in his own twisted way of living, right? So abusive. He claimed that he was doing his best to take care of me. But if I believe that, I just want to receive. I *just don't* want to have to figure everything out on my own anymore. Even if it's harmful and abusive and it isolates me, it's just easier to belong to something.¹⁷⁷

Sophia's lifelong survival strategy of performing to belong academically and socially resulted in her relying on an abusive relationship to meet her needs for care and belonging.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Sophia, Interview by author, October 26, 2016.

Eirene's story is slightly different in that while she felt the pressure to perform well, she never felt that she measured up:

[...] others seem so much more put together, why don't I? Like others have manicured lawns and picket fences and great looking houses. That was the image I had in mind back then those first two years in seminary. Oh, wow, everybody is so capable and they know what they're doing spiritually and academically and in terms of future and relationships.

Well, I felt like my house is totally shit and inside the house is—may be outside it looks a little more presentable, but inside all the wooden boards are rotten and there's sewage coming up from under the floor boards, and I have a lot of things that I need to work on. So I felt ashamed, embarrassed, inadequate. Inadequate is the word that keeps coming up in my life.¹⁷⁸

Eirene graduated two Ivy League institutions, but she constantly doubted her performance and felt like a failure most of the time. This sense of inadequacy will be explored more in depth in relation to race, class, and faith, but the discrepancy between the norm and her struggling performance gnawed at her constantly and sapped her energy. For example, when she first moved to Indonesia and the U.S., Eirene had a hard time making friends. Looking back, Eirene can attribute that difficulty to her introverted personality. She has come to accept that she is introverted and shy, but during those early years of her life, her parents worried that something might be wrong with her.

When I moved to Indonesia and when I moved to the U.S., my parents really thought there was something wrong with me because I am not very social, like I don't make friends readily. Like, "What's wrong with you?" I felt like I was very deficient and asked myself, "What's wrong with me?"¹⁷⁹

At an early age, Eirene began to doubt herself in part due to the pressure to perform and her seeming failure to fulfill the norms of integrating into the social fabric of the new culture.

Likewise, all three women's accounts highlight how each woman responded to the stresses of moving and adapting to new cultures as children. Vera adapted quickly by working hard to speak the language and make friends without skipping a beat. Behind Vera's incredible adjustment, however, remained an unfulfilled longing for attention and manifestation of psychosomatic symptoms. Similarly, Sophia created a "Best Girl" persona who would be smart, compliant, loved,

¹⁷⁸ Eirene, Interview by author, October 25, 2016.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

and accepted. She tried to keep this up even when she felt depressed and suicidal in the U.S, eventually resorting to an unhealthy relationship for relief. Eirene blamed herself for not living up to the cultural cues in her new environment and struggled with insecurity and self-doubt for most of her youth and young adult life. These women's narratives provide a window into the unspoken needs of TCKs and the various ways in which they sought to mask their pain through performance. While performance may work as a survival strategy, the unprocessed stress may catch up in unhealthy ways like Sophia and Vera or leave lingering self-doubt, as in Eirene's case.

Loneliness and nonbelonging

Loneliness and non-belonging emerged as a second common theme across their experiences. While Vera adjusted quickly to her new environments and made friends easily, she stated that she felt a constant sting of loneliness and longing for attention throughout her life. While her parents were occupied with the demands and stress of adjusting to a foreign country, Vera felt the pressure to be the mature, obedient eldest daughter who took care of her sister. She also had to grow self-sufficient throughout her teenage years while her mother was recovering in Korea. Vera handled everything alone like a champ—finishing high school, applying to college, moving back to Korea, and going to college. But there was a side of her that simply wanted to be a child showered with love and attention.

In addition to loneliness, Vera was aware that she never fully belonged anywhere. Although Russia felt home to her, she was always perceived as a foreigner and her temporary visa status reminded her that she was a foreigner. She did not quite belong with the children of Korean families who were in Russia for business, nor did she identify with the Korean Russians, who were Russians with Korean ethnic heritage. When she went back to Korea, she was a citizen on paper, but Koreans still perceived her as a foreigner. She found herself out of sync her Korean peers who shared

collective cultural memories or humor. Loneliness and nonbelonging were part of Vera's experiences as a TCK.

Eirene and Sophia both stated that moving to the U.S. was pronouncedly more painful and alienating than when they had moved around southeast Asian countries. On top of losing her friends in Indonesia, Eirene experienced a new level of loss when she felt marginalized as a lower class Asian in the U.S.:

My second move from Indonesia to the U.S., I hated it. I wanted to go back to Indonesia. [...] My friends were all there. So I remember really feeling lonely and hating it. [...] My family's socioeconomic status really fell when we moved to the U.S., so being a minority. Of course, in Indonesia we were also a minority, but we were more on the middle class kind of minority as Koreans. But now in the U.S., we were on the lower class minority, so this also really affected things.¹⁸⁰

In the U.S. she became a social outsider with no friends. She retreated inward and became reflective, absorbed in books. Her loneliness and feelings of non-belonging took a major toll on her self-esteem and sense of agency throughout college and grad school.

Similarly, Sophia felt the acute pain of loneliness and nonbelonging when she moved to the U.S. During previous moves around southeast Asian countries, she could pass as one of the Chinese elite, and her family was wealthy. But when her family moved to the U.S., their socioeconomic status fell, and she was no longer part of the upper echelons of society:

I felt the glaring difference between *my* appearance and the other "normal" Americans. [...] And so when I came to this country, [...] white [was] the norm, and it was so clear that I was not fully welcomed. I had no room. There was no room for me to be my own person and be taken seriously.¹⁸¹

In high school Sophia tried to find a place to belong, but she felt left out from her own racial group of East Asians, who divided themselves into Koreans straight from Korea and second-generation Koreans. The two groups did not mix, and she did not feel she belonged to either. She ended up

¹⁸⁰ Eirene, Interview by author, October 25, 2016.

¹⁸¹ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

sitting with the Puerto Ricans, Indians, and other Asians who didn't care if she was second-generation or straight from Korea. Over time, she became like a chameleon, who would tap into different parts of herself depending on what group she was with. Her ability to adapt to different groups helped her piecemeal some sort of superficial belonging, but her chameleon-like tendencies made it hard for her to figure out who she really was. It stung to be alienated by peers of her own race and ethnicity on top of being marginalized as a lower class Asian American in the U.S.

Faith

If performance pressure, loneliness, and non-belonging were the prominent dislocating factors in the women's narrative identities, faith was the strongest grounding and empowering factor for all three women. Each claimed that their faith was the only stable source of identity and belonging during their TCK experience. For example, they could not fully claim citizenship or nationality of any one country, but the one thing that they could claim was that they were God's children and citizens of heaven. Scripture verses that affirmed their identity helped them feel like they were loved, beautiful, and empowered over society's oppressive messages about what kind of women they were supposed to be. They could confide in God when they were too scared to be vulnerable with people, and faith communities provided a community where they felt they could belong. Biblical narratives, such as Abraham's call narrative (Gen 12:1) or Jesus having no place to lay his head (Matt 8:20), played a powerfully formative role in the way they interpreted their own lives and the significant life decisions they made.

Performance pressure, loneliness, nonbelonging, and faith emerged as common themes in the life chapters portion of the interview when participants were asked to describe their lives in a as if it were a novel or a book. These themes revealed their greatest stressors and care needs as well as faith as a significant source of healing and empowerment. The following chapter explores how these

themes can be understood more in depth through highlighting their stories/silence about race and class.

Chapter 4

“What the hell is water?” Exploring Narratives of Race and Class

I cannot forget that first day at school in the U.S. at a predominantly white, evangelical, small Christian private school. I had just moved to the U.S. from the Philippines as a junior in high school, an impeccable timing when no other junior is looking for new friends. Things were not going too badly until lunch time arrived, and I felt overwhelmed about where I should sit. “It’s okay, I got this,” I said to myself and inserted myself boldly in the middle of a vibrant lunch table. I began to unpack my lunch as my brain and ears strained to figure out how to fit into conversations around me. To my dismay, the people next to me turned their bodies away and carried on with their conversations as if I were invisible. Never one to give up easily, I asserted myself and introduced myself to the people around me. The white students acknowledged my name with little interest and ignored me the rest of the time. I ate my lunch in silence and stared down at my lunch as it began to become blurry with my tears. Fighting the tears, I chewed hard on the food that I had no appetite for. I remember feeling ashamed and angry, but mostly ashamed. I was angry about how rude and uncaring the students were, but more intensely, I felt ashamed. ‘Something must be wrong with me—I must not be pretty or cool enough or they would show a little more interest.’ That feeling of being invisible would follow me for many years, but it would be a long time before I would be able to put a finger on it. Instead, a gnawing sense of self-blame and shame would motivate me to compensate for the feelings of deficiency through academic and spiritual performance. It would be over two decades later when I would be able to examine more deeply the narrative environments that led to internalizing the shame that never should have been mine in the first place.

Narrative environments often play a crucial role in the way we interpret the world and understand ourselves, but they are not always self-evident. American novelist David Foster Wallace

once shared a joke about a fish that asks another fish, “Hey, how’s the water?” and the other fish replies, “What the hell is water?” This joke tries to capture the reality that sometimes we may be completely unaware of what makes up our environment. Narrative environments can remain hidden from conscious awareness unless we intentionally examine them or if we are thrown into an environment that makes us feel like a “fish out of water.” For this reason, this chapter explores the narrative environments of race and class to illumine the world behind the TCK women’s experiences.

Narrative Environments

People do not tell stories in a vacuum but rather within narrative environments. They consist of larger socio-cultural, national, historical, institutional, religious, and familial narratives that also shape people’s beliefs about themselves and the world.¹⁸² For instance, our families offer the most immediate micro environment where we learn spoken and unspoken narratives about how to interpret the world and how to interact with others. Beyond the micro-environments of our families, we navigate multiple narrative environments that provide a wide variety of explicit and implicit assumptions, perspectives, values, and beliefs that shape how we edit and compose the stories of our lives.¹⁸³ The narratives that are accepted and privileged the most are called master narratives. For instance, take the master narrative of white supremacy in the media. This master narrative is at work behind movies and television shows that tend to give interesting and complex roles to white actors while typecasting people of color in racially stereotyped roles. These representations provide the materials out of which people edit and construct stories about reality and people’s identities. Beauty product advertisements that use only white models or demonstrate a “desirable” transformation

¹⁸² Randall and McKim, *Reading Our Lives: The Poetics of Growing Old*, 50.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 51.

from darker to lighter skin perpetuate messages of white supremacy in our narrative environments. In the political sphere, if all the political representatives of a nation are white and male, this representation affects how people perceive and process the unspoken rules of race and gender--who gets to have a voice or who can be in leadership roles. In these ways, narrative environments reveal the beliefs and assumptions underneath the way people understand the world and themselves.

It is important to recognize that narrative environments are not value-neutral. They are laden with socio-political, cultural, historical, or religious messages that impact how certain lived experiences get expressed over others.¹⁸⁴ Christmas, for example, is a Judeo-Christian holiday that is observed nationally in the U.S., while Jewish or Muslim holidays receive little to no national recognition. The religious narrative of Christianity tends to dominate the narrative environment in the United States, and those who feel entitled to this privilege work hard to keep it this way. Some Christians felt deeply threatened and offended by Starbucks company's change of their cups' message from "Merry Christmas" to a more religiously neutral, "Happy Holidays." Likewise, narrative environments are rife with emotional impact because people derive meaning from them. Some narratives are deeply influential, while others are fleeting and inconsequential.¹⁸⁵ Some stories empower and promote positive possibilities for its characters as creative and worthy agents, while others enslave its characters as deficient, dysfunctional characters with dull plots.¹⁸⁶ For example, psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon wrote scathingly against enslaving narratives depicted in the media that are psychologically damaging to black people:

Whether he likes or not, the black man has to wear the livery the white man has fabricated for him. Look at children's comic books: all the Blacks are mouthing the ritual "Yes, boss." In films the situation is even more acute. Most of the American films dubbed in French reproduce the grinning stereotype Y a bon Banania. In one of the films, *Steel Sharks*, there is a black guy on a submarine speaking the most downright classic dialect

¹⁸⁴ White, *Re-Authoring Lives: Interviews and Essays*, 13.

¹⁸⁵ Scheib, *Pastoral Care: Telling the Stories of Our Lives*, 87.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

imaginable. Furthermore, he is a true nigger, walking behind the quartermaster, trembling at the latter's slightest fit of anger, and is killed in the end. [...] The reason is that the black man has to be portrayed in a certain way, and the same stereotype can be found from the black man in Sans pitié—"Me work hard, me never life, me never steal"—to the servant in *Duel in the Sun*. All they ask of the black man is to be a good nigger; the rest will follow on its own. Making him speak pidgin is tying him to an image, snaring him, imprisoning him as the eternal victim of his own essence, of a visible appearance for which he is not responsible.¹⁸⁷

Fanon critiques the tired tropes and predictable portrayals of black stereotypes that reinforce narratives of inferiority and enslavement rather than dignity and self-worth. Like Fanon, I believe that it is crucial to unmask the hidden stories at work in people's lives and get a clearer picture of their narrative environments. Similarly, TCKs' stories cannot be distilled to psychological and personal issues without engaging their narrative environments, which is why I will situate my participants' stories in context and listen for the master narratives that shaped their experiences.

Race and Class in Sophia and Eirene's Narratives

Two of the participants—Sophia and Eirene—shared prominent themes of loneliness, depression, nonbelonging, and low self-worth for almost twenty years beginning in their early adolescence. In their stories, they named race and class as contributing to the most destructive master narratives that ate away at their self-esteem and emotional well-being. Their pain intensified when they entered the U.S. and found themselves in a narrative environment that designated them as poor and marginalized Asian Americans. The sudden drop in their socioeconomic and racial status led to severe stress, depression, feelings of inadequacy and non-belonging.

Sophia shared how her move to the U.S. was especially jarring in comparison with the times that she moved around Southeast Asian countries. When her family moved around Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines, she observed that her family with lighter skin color was helping people with darker skin who were poor. She inferred that *lighter* skin and *higher* socioeconomic status reflected greater worth and superiority. While these thoughts were not consciously articulated, they

¹⁸⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove 1952), 17.

were simply embedded in her narrative environment. She attended rich, private schools for the Chinese elite, wore expensive “frilly dresses”¹⁸⁸ from high end stores, and had a mansion with domestic servants. She described herself as a “snobby, arrogant little girl.”¹⁸⁹ While she was not Chinese, she looked the part, knew Chinese culture, spoke Chinese, and benefited from being able to pass as one of them.

Then the rude awakening happened overnight when her family moved to the U.S. Suddenly, she found herself living in a small apartment with no domestic servants. They could no longer afford to eat out, and now her clothes came from thrift stores. Her mother, who had a master’s degree, was making ends meet at a low-wage, menial job. That was when her worldview broke down, and she realized that she was no longer part of the “upper echelon of society”:

I felt the glaring difference between my appearance and the other “normal” Americans. [...] And so when I came to this country, [...] white [was] the norm, and it was so clear that I was not fully welcomed. I had no room. There was no room for me to be my own person and be taken seriously.¹⁹⁰

Sophia’s story shows that moving to a different country is a challenge but that the challenges vary according to one’s position or relationship to their narrative environment. For example, when Sophia moved around Southeast Asian countries, she was part of the master narratives that positioned her in relative wealth and power compared to the “darker-skinned” people. But when she got out of that narrative environment, she was jolted into a new narrative environment where she was no longer swimming in the mainstream. Sophia had not been consciously aware of her

¹⁸⁸ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

complicity in the color lines created by colonial oppression and exploitation of people of color--the “darker races.”¹⁹¹

The emergence of color lines and their associated meanings can be traced back to the 15th century when European nations began to turn partner trading relationships to those of slavery and submission.¹⁹² The Europeans began to conquer, divide, categorize, and exploit indigenous peoples and their natural resources, all the while circulating the rhetoric that Africans, Asians, Americans, and Pacific Islanders were savage, lazy, and inferior people in need of white civilization to bring order to their chaos.¹⁹³ Contemporary images of impoverished, darker skinned people in underdeveloped countries need to be understood in its historical context--that of the colonizers spreading narratives associating darker skin with inferiority and laziness to justify their conquest. In truth, the people with darker skin were productive, but the abundance of their labor were siphoned back to European empires.¹⁹⁴ This “parasitic” relationship led the rise of “the world system that led to European development and its reciprocal, Third World underdevelopment.”¹⁹⁵ *World systems theory* explains this economic and political trajectory that led to European nations dominating the center of the world system, while the countries supplying the raw materials and labor were made to decline in the periphery.¹⁹⁶ As the colonizers repeatedly raped and plundered people’s bodies, minds, and lands, Third World peoples were forced to be dependent on their colonial masters. Even after colonial powers formally relinquished their legal, institutional, and territorial claims to “indigenous based, formally sovereign, nation-states,” oppressive colonial arrangements still persist with new faces.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Color Line Belts the World," in *W. E. B. Du Bois on Asia*, ed. Bill V. Mullen and Cathryn Watson (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 34.

¹⁹² Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy: Toward a Racially Inclusive Model*, 86.

¹⁹³ Gary Y. Okihiro, *Third World Studies: Theorizing Liberation* (Durham: Duke University, 2016), 75.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁹⁷ Prasenjit Duara, in *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then*, ed. Prasenjit Duara, *Rewriting Histories* (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

Social class stratification became the new face of old colonial structures of hierarchy. Pre-existing economic inequities between the fledgling, periphery nation-states and European centers were replicated through exploitative business and commerce methods that further deepened the gap between the peripheries and the core. Neocolonialism describes the indirect political, economic, cultural exertion of former colonizers on developing countries—for example, supporting leaders in developing countries that would act favorably towards enriching old colonial relationships. Neocolonialism impeded the self-sufficiency of indigenous economies, thus constricting Third World¹⁹⁸ peoples to low standards of living and forcing them with few other choices than to enter into global capitalism through offering their resources and labor at cheap prices to foreign investors.

Sophia was living in these kinds of hidden narrative environments with old colonial and neocolonial legacies. She was not aware of the long history of colonial exploitation that had given birth to present forms of racialized identities and the negative meanings attached to darker skin. Thus, when she saw the underdevelopment, poverty, and dark-skinned people in Southeast Asian countries, she associated dark skin with inferiority and dependence, not fully understanding the historical dynamics behind their dependence. She herself identified with the superior, light-skinned race, but she was shocked when white people did not recognize the superiority and value she assigned to herself. She thought, “How come White people don’t know and value who I am? [...] I *am* one of you. Don’t you know where I’m from? I am *somebody* important. Why don’t white people see that?”¹⁹⁹

Unbeknownst to Sophia, there were historical reasons for why Sophia was regarded as inferior for being Asian in the U.S. When Britain and the U.S. officially banned the African slave trade in the early nineteenth century, they needed to replace slave labor and began to hire non-

¹⁹⁸ See note 103 for explanation on my choice of the term “Third World”.

¹⁹⁹ Sophia, Written communication. February 4, 2018.

whites from underdeveloped areas, as they were cheaper to hire than whites.²⁰⁰ Asians were one of the groups that supplied the labor in demand, but they were vulnerable to extreme exploitation based on race, gender, and citizenship. Okihiro explains:

Marked as inferior peoples, Africans and Asians were also aliens without the rights of property and citizenship. Bans on mixing policed the lines of segregation, and nonwhites in white settler society could be easily spotted and put into their assigned places.²⁰¹

Denied the rights of property or citizenship, Asians were restricted from climbing the economic ladder or finding a place in society. Add to this the long history of racism against Asian Americans in the U.S., evidenced by institutional racism in exclusionary immigration laws against Asian Americans, the forced internment of Japanese Americans during WWII, and the assimilation project of racial minorities by sociologists in the 1920s.²⁰² The long history of treating Asians as subhuman without rights is etched into the narrative environment of the U.S. This helps illumine why Sophia and Eirene felt so marginalized when they first came to the U.S. It might also provide some context to why Sophia found her mother consigned to a low-wage job despite her level of education.

It is also interesting to note that Sophia's experience of her school lunch room reflects the strict enforcement of segregation when non-whites were not allowed to mingle to discourage any kind of solidarity. Sophia found the school lunch room strictly divided along racial lines. She even found division among Koreans, who divided themselves into Koreans straight from Korea and second-generation Koreans. The two groups did not mix at all. If she decided to sit with one group, then she would be labeled with that group, and since she did not want to participate in the divide, she decided to sit with a group of Pan-Asians--Puerto Ricans, Indians, and other Asians.

²⁰⁰ Okihiro, *Third World Studies: Theorizing Liberation*, 89.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² American sociologist Robert E. Park from University of Chicago and affiliated sociologists proposed the assimilation model, which argued that all immigrants pass through four phases—contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation. Any racial group that did not fall into this paradigm were seen as problematic and labeled as the “Negro problem” or the “Oriental problem.” For further reading on racism in Asian American historiography, see Sucheng Chan, "Asian American Historiography," *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 3 (1996): 363-99.

Vera experienced a similar segregation when she went to college in Korea. The Korean students who had spent time abroad did not mix with the native Koreans. In some cases, the Koreans who had spent only a few years abroad seemed to flaunt their English and speak Korean with exaggerated Anglophone accents that did not seem natural. Vera thought this was a bit pretentious since they had only spent a few years abroad, which was not enough time to forget Korean or develop such strong American accents. They were choosing to identify with white identity as if it were superior to Korean identity. Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire describes this behavior as *prescription*, a phenomenon in which the oppressor's ways become inscribed and preferred in the consciousness of the oppressed: "Thus the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor."²⁰³ Colonialism and the policing of the lines of segregation were formally over, but the vestiges of colonial prescriptive behavior seem to continue in students who believed in the superiority of American identity over Korean identity and those reenacting strict segregation in the lunch room according to race or levels of acculturation. These binary systems of segregation made belonging an elusive target for Sophia and Vera, and the tendency for strict segregation begs the question of the vestiges of enforced segregation and internalized colonialism.

Since Sophia did not understand these contexts of her narrative environment, she reacted at first by lashing out in anger and wondering if her family had done something wrong to invoke poverty into their lives. She remembers throwing tantrums out of stress and frustration:

'I hate being poor.' I remember that so clearly. I was like, I hate this. I hate our life this way. Like why do we have to be poor? Did we do anything wrong? As if poverty is a sign of a character flaw or something, you know. [...] It's as if I was mad at God, too. I was like, 'God, did we do something wrong? Like, you blessed us with so much before and now I felt like we have nothing, and we were scraping to get by. And I was like, I don't get it. It's so frustrating. Yeah, it was really frustrating.'²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 50th Anniversary Edition*, trans. Myra R. Bergman (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 47.

²⁰⁴ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

As Sophia was retelling this part of her life during the interview, this became a powerful moment when she realized why her transition to the U.S. was so difficult for her. She began tearing up as she said:

I never really thought about [the role of class]. It was just like, oh, yeah, I was rich one day and poor the next, [...] but never connecting the dots and allowing myself the permission. Like, oh, it's understandable why I reacted that way. [...] before this interview, I was like, oh, yeah, I was just being a selfish brat. But now thinking like, no, it's traumatic. It's a whole lifestyle that changed overnight.²⁰⁵

As Sophia reflected on the role of class in her life story, she was able to reframe her anger at the time not as the senseless tantrums of a “selfish brat” but of a child grappling with the drastic changes in economic security and the negative societal meanings attached to being a poor Asian in the U.S. This part of the interview demonstrated how important it can be for TCKs to deconstruct their narrative environments in cases where they came to internalize life-limiting narratives of racism or class shame.

Without being able to process her anger in ways that she could understand, Sophia began to internalize the nonbelonging and struggled with depression, suicidal thoughts, and low self-esteem. She began to express her pain, but her family was not equipped to care for her in the ways that she needed because they were also struggling to manage their own stress of living in the United States. She contemplated suicide often. Once, she locked herself in her room and slipped out a letter asking what the meaning of her life was. She duct-taped her door, locked herself in and said she would not come out until she could get the answer to her question. Her father came out more harshly and kicked her door down to scold her, saying, “How could you say this? How ungrateful are you about the life that God has given you?”²⁰⁶ This explosive conflict between Sophia and her father was characteristic of her family dynamic throughout her adolescence. She described herself as the

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

identified patient (IP), which is a family therapy term that describes a person in the family who acts out the stress, dysfunction, or trauma in the family system.

In a family systems perspective, the symptom-bearer sometimes functions as a diversion to distract from the more fearful issues threatening the family system. For example, an adolescent might keep attempting suicide amidst the underlying threat of his parents on the brink of divorce. As the IP, he may be diverting attention away from a deeper family conflict and an imminent divorce or the family may be unconsciously gathering around the presenting problem to protect themselves from other fears that they cannot face directly. While the concept of the IP can be helpful for noticing patterns of dysfunctions within the family's micro-environment, it is also important to also understand that the dysfunctions in the family are intricately related to their macro narrative environment.

Sophia's family was suffering not only from internal family dysfunctions but also from external factors, particularly those of class and race. Unaware of these larger narratives, Sophia's family tried to adjust silently and accept how things were, but Sophia voiced her pain, signaling that something was terribly wrong. Her father, however, did not have the emotional wherewithal to care for Sophia's pain. He tried to find a solution by silencing her pain with the religious narrative of gratitude, which points the responsibility of one's suffering to personal, spiritual negligence. If only she could feel grateful for the life that God had given to her, she would not be suffering. This religious narrative, separate from the racial and socioeconomic narrative environment, turns a blind eye to the systemic injustices and oppression that contributed greatly to Sophia's depression and suicidal contemplation.

Eirene's story reflects a similar internalizing of racism and class shame in ways that were severely damaging to her psychological well-being as well. Like Sophia, Eirene's transition to the U.S. felt especially disruptive and marginalizing. Here are her words about the transition:

My second move from Indonesia to the U.S., I hated it. I wanted to go back to Indonesia. [...] My friends were all there. So I remember really feeling lonely and hating it. [...] My family's socioeconomic status really fell when we moved to the U.S., so being a minority. Of course, in Indonesia we were also a minority, but we were more on the middle class kind of minority as Koreans. But now in the U.S., we were on the lower class minority, so this also really affected things.²⁰⁷

Losing her close friends and learning a new culture already presented painful challenges, but now Eirene had to grapple with racial discrimination and the social disdain that comes with being poor. Whereas Sophia expressed anger in response to the pain of being marginalized, Eirene dealt with the pain by shifting her thinking and minimizing the problem. She chose not to assert her rights as a resident or citizen in the U.S. by positioning herself as an outsider even though she became a resident and later a U.S. citizen. She stated that she was not affected too deeply by the racist ignorance of Americans:

I always felt like, "These ignorant Americans, of course they don't know about Korea. Of course, they don't know about me. Why should I expect them to respect me when as part of that community, I don't feel like I'm a part of that community either?"²⁰⁸

Asian American psychologist Wen H. Kuo calls this kind of response to racism a strategy of *accommodation*, which is when Asian Americans restructure their thinking to minimize racism or ignore discrimination.²⁰⁹ Although Eirene minimized her experiences of racism, she began to feel an inexplicable sense of personal deficiency and inadequacy by the time she entered university. Even before she set foot into the Ivy League university where she was accepted, she began to doubt whether she was going to measure up. She described her doubts and questions at the time:

Did they make a mistake in letting me in? That sort of thing. I got deferred from the beginning and I was let in because they had room for me in January. So I felt like that whole institution of higher education was against me and I didn't feel adequate enough to go against it somehow, or use that system, somehow become an agent in that dynamic.

²⁰⁷ Eirene, Interview by author, October 25, 2016.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Wen H. Kuo, "Coping with Racial Discrimination: The Case of Asian Americans," *Racial and Ethnic Studies* 18, no. 1 (1995): 116.

Eirene's experience of navigating an Ivy League Institution as an Asian American woman from low socioeconomic background echoes the literature on how social identity threats impact psychological well-being in elite university settings.²¹⁰

Social identity threat describes when one's social identity is devalued in a particular context.²¹¹

One's race, gender, or SES can be a social identity threat. For example, a study revealed that first year Black and Latino students at elite private institutions expressed concerns about potential stigmas and academic competence more than their White peers even before school started.²¹² Stewart and Ostrove conducted a similar study of students from lower SES backgrounds who attended Radcliffe College in the early 1960s, and the women from lower SES backgrounds reported greater feelings of alienation from the dominant college culture than did women of higher SES backgrounds.²¹³ Women with lower SES backgrounds expressed struggles with "being academically unprepared, being overwhelmed or intimidated, being socially isolated or feeling socially inadequate, and being financially hard pressed."²¹⁴ In these ways social identity threats can place psychological burdens on students and can interfere with their academic performance. In another study, Steele, Johnson, and Finkel explored how social identity threat affected the self-regulatory abilities of students from lower SES backgrounds at elite universities.²¹⁵ The implications of their studies

²¹⁰ See Sarah E. Johnson and Jennifer E. Richeson, "Middle Class and Marginal? Socioeconomic Status, Stigma, and Self-Regulation at an Elite University," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100, no. 5 (2011): 838-52; Joan M. Ostrove and Susan M. Long, "Social Class and Belonging: Implications for College Adjustment," *The Review of Higher Education* 30, no. 4 (2007): 363-89.

²¹¹ Johnson and Richeson, "Middle Class and Marginal? Socioeconomic Status, Stigma, and Self-Regulation at an Elite University," 838.

²¹² Douglas S. Massey et al., *The Source of the River: The Social Origins of Freshmen at America's Selective Colleges and Universities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2011), 184-96.

²¹³ Abigail J. Stewart and Joan M. Ostrove, "Social Class, Social Change, and Gender: Working-Class Women at Radcliffe and After," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1993): 475-97.

²¹⁴ Joan M. Ostrove, "Belonging and Wanting: Meanings of Social Class Background for Women's Constructions of Their College Experiences," *Journal of Social Issues* 59, no. 4 (2003): 773.

²¹⁵ Claude M. Steele, Steven J. Spencer, and Joshua Aronson, "Contending with Group Image: The Psychology of Stereotype and Social Identity Threat," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 34 (2002): 379.

showed that lower SES students at an elite private university were sensitive about the level of their SES compared to their higher SES peers and showed higher concern about their academic competence than their peers from higher SES backgrounds.²¹⁶ These studies point to the reality that social identity threats can deplete the coping resources of students, affecting academic performance.

Eirene resonated with these studies and said that this made sense when she looked back on her college years:

Recently, I read this article about how people from lower economic class or people who are in the racial minority, they get into high level colleges, really competitive colleges, and they don't really succeed because they were never given the permission to work the system, that institution, to assert their rights as individuals and to go around and find where the opportunities are. There's a lack of information and lack of self-agency. People in the higher economic status, their parents might have been knowledgeable about the system, they had the information or may be even their parents were the ones who made the system. But as a foreigner, somebody in the minority, and also a person in the lower socioeconomic status, I felt like I should be trying to adjust to the system instead of changing the system, barely survive within the system, that faceless, scary institution [...] that I barely knew. I think now that I look back to college, reading that article really made sense of why I had such trouble in college.²¹⁷

Indeed, the psychological burden of years of racism and the stigma of a lower SES background began to deplete her confidence and coping abilities. She began to question her competence in everything, struggling like a ship without an anchor as her grades flagged C's and D's. Before college, she had received A's and B's mostly, but now that she was at an institution where she felt inadequate and out of place, she struggled with low self-esteem and inadequacy. This is the haunting metaphor that she used to describe how she felt inside:

Well, I felt like my house is totally shit. May be outside it looks a little bit more presentable, but inside all the wooden boards are rotten and there's sewage coming up from under the floor boards, and I have a lot of things that I need to work on. So I felt ashamed, embarrassed, inadequate. Inadequate is the word that keeps coming up in my life.

²¹⁶ Johnson and Richeson, "Middle Class and Marginal? Socioeconomic Status, Stigma, and Self-Regulation at an Elite University," 849.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

Eirene's self-description confirms why I think that the needs of minoritized TCKs get overlooked and fester without proper attention. She seemed to be fine on the outside, but she described herself inside as "shit" and "sewage coming up from under the floor boards." The inexplicable shame and inadequacy that she felt in her life points to her living in a narrative environment that lacked positive mirroring and validation about her as an Asian American woman from a low socioeconomic background.

The connection between Eirene's narrative environment and her deep sense of failure becomes more evident when she takes a two-year leave of absence from seminary to teach in Korea. While she had many reservations about whether she would be able to overcome the cultural barriers and find anything in common with Koreans, Eirene was pleasantly surprised. She found good friends and discovered that she loved to teach. Most interestingly, her language in this part of the interview conveyed the most happiness in her overall life story:

And then followed by two years in Korea with a firmer sense of who I am as a Korean and who I am as an adult, somehow having more of an agency as an individual and finding that I love teaching. So it was a pretty happy period. And then I went back to the U.S. and those two years were the loneliest time I ever had. It was so lonely.²¹⁸

The words that I emphasized communicate a growing sense of self, positive identification with a national identity, self-agency, and appreciation of her own competence in teaching. She describes how different it felt to develop some sort of racial/ethnic identity since previously, she felt invisible in the U.S.:

When I came back to Korea I felt like I had now more of a concrete skin [...] that was different from the whites and the Blacks and that's okay. That difference, that sense of identity and that sense of difference from others now enables me to have real contact with others. Before that I felt like some floating vapor without skin, without sense of racial identity or ethnic identity. I'm just myself. But now spending time in Korea I acquired a more concrete sense of racial identity, ethnic identity somehow so that when I went back to the U.S. now I felt like I have skin that I could touch others with and not be absorbed into it but be in contact.

²¹⁸ Eirene, Interview by author, October 25, 2016. (italics mine)

Being in Korea seems to have somehow validated and given boundaries to her racial and ethnic identity. In the U.S., she felt like a “floating vapor” that was absorbed somewhere in the White and Black racial discourse, but being in Korea helped her feel more grounded in her Korean identity.

When asked for clarification about what she meant by a “floating vapor,” she explained:

Floating vapor. No outline. Because I wanted to be everything. [...] I felt like I ought to be everything, but I'm also nothing at the same time. But now I know that I can't be everything. I am Asian and I cannot be white or Black or anything else. I am Korean and I have skin. I have boundaries. I have likes and dislikes. I have things that I am good at and bad at and that's okay.

Being in Korea helped her gain clarity not only about her racial and ethnic identity but also about her preferences and competencies.²¹⁹ In Erikson's identity developmental terms, she was going through industry vs. inferiority as well as identity vs. role confusion at the same time. She tried on different identities and roles, sorted through the cues from her peers and social groups and built a firmer sense of who she was in the world both with and apart from others. What I find significant in her developmental achievements is that something about being in Korea seemed to have been a catalyst in this process. Eirene could not put a finger on it, but she said that something was different in Korea:

I don't know how. I can't honestly say I know what it was. Maybe just time, maybe just a very practical time period when those two years in Korea when I felt like I could do something, I felt like

²¹⁹ I want to make a note here about her need “to be everything.” Research on TCKs show that TCKs often act like chameleons, flexible in their ability to change colors to adapt to diverse cultures and social groups. Both Vera and Sophia's stories reflect this switching on and off of different parts of themselves. Vera always formed friend groups easily, able to adjust herself to connect with different groups even though she did not always feel strong commitment or belonging to that specific group. For example, she talked about her Russian friends in high school, who would ask her why she wasn't hanging out with them more. She would still hang out with them and enjoy herself, but they seemed to express more of a commitment to her than she to them. When she was with that group, she could turn on that part of herself that made it seem like she was one of them, but she could also walk away from that group without too deep of an attachment. Similarly, Sophia used her chameleon-like social skills to create small pockets of diverse friends, since she could not really find belonging in any single group. While the flexible social skills helped her read people well and overcome barriers to create connections, it also made it harder and longer for her to feel grounded about who she really was, not only who she became to adapt to others. Perhaps Eirene this is part of what Eirene meant when she said that she felt this pressure to be everything to everyone and to do everything well.

I was more in charge somehow, that I was more capable. I have more of a sense of agency. [...] but something was different then. Then I went back to the U.S. and I had so much time to myself. I felt like I was in somehow a nunnery dungeon looking up at the leafless trees. That was a period when I took all these photos of leafless trees and said October and November.²²⁰

The change in her narrative environment made a significant difference in her constructing a more empowering identity. The narrative environment in Korea probably provided a corrective mirror in which she saw herself for who she was rather than through the “white gaze,” which Fanon writes incisively about as an invalidating gaze that reduces a black person to uncertainty.²²¹ W. E. B. Du Bois also describes this struggle to be free from the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”²²²

Even though Eirene is not black, she has experienced the “white gaze” all throughout her life in the U.S. as an Asian American woman. When she was younger, other children called her “Ching Chong China” or “slanty-eyed” and asked whether she knew Bruce Lee or if she was from North Korea. When she attended a predominantly white seminary, she rarely spoke in class because of her lack of interest in the subject, but her white professor approached her to ask if she needed help with her English. Years later when she worked as a hospital chaplain, the patients called her a China doll—“Oh, you’re such a cute China doll!”²²³ She was young, female, and Asian American, which did not fit patients’ expectations of a typical old, white, male pastoral figure. She remembers desperately wanting her white hairs to settle in so that she could “at least have that age thing.”²²⁴ It is

²²⁰ Eirene, Interview by author, October 25, 2016.

²²¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.

²²² W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989), 45.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

no wonder that Eirene felt freer to be away from the narrative environment of the U.S. where the “white gaze” constantly reduced her to racist and sexist stereotypes. Living in Korea gave her to freedom to look at her weaknesses and strengths with courage, embrace her limits, and become an agent with her strengths rather than crumble from unfounded low self-esteem and inferiority.

Finally, just because Eirene felt freer in the narrative environment in Korea, it does not mean that the narrative environment in Korea was free of racism, classism, or sexism. It is important to name Eirene’s privileged position within a Korean narrative environment, since she is a Korean American with an Ivy League education from the U.S. Because Korea tends to value the ability to speak English, Ivy League education, and U.S. citizenship, Eirene had three powerful assets that probably put her in a higher standing within her narrative environment. According to Eirene, she “could do whatever she wanted,”²²⁵ meaning that she did not feel the need to confine herself to every Korean convention because people would excuse her non-conforming ways to her being an American. As a result, she dressed like a hippie with long dangling earrings, long skirts and wear jeans to teach class, all of which are not mainstream Korean conventions. It is likely that Eirene felt more empowered and in charge in the narrative environment in Korea due in large part to her U.S. citizenship, fluency in English, and Ivy League education that gave her a more privileged position in that society. In conjunction with these privileges, Eirene developed a positive identity as a Korean in an environment that normalized her race and ethnicity.

Summary

The common themes of race and class in the participants’ life stories provide a window into the largely unconscious and hidden narrative environments that shape not only identity but also emotional and social well-being. Narrative environments consist of stories that are replete with values, beliefs, histories, and assumptions that provide the materials out of which people construct

²²⁵ Ibid.

their identities and interpret their world. As Stuart Hall put it, “Identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.”²²⁶ Minoritized TCKs would benefit from examining the different ways they are positioned by and within the narratives of the past because exploring deconstructing those narrative environments may lead to deeper insight, compassion, and humility in ways that they had not known before. Eirene, for instance, was able to share a more compassionate story about her immense struggles in college. Sophia demonstrated the humility to recognize her own complicity in colonial, racist narratives and discovered a newfound compassion for her younger self during her family’s turbulent transition to the U.S. TCKs’ different life stories and experiences cannot be lumped together as if all grief, developmental challenges, depression, or feelings of non-belonging were the same. Their stories need to be voiced and their narrative environments deconstructed, opening up possibilities for repentance, healing, compassion, empowerment, or resistance.

In this chapter, we explored what two of the women said about race and class. In the next chapter, we will explore the role of gender in the women’s lives, about which the women said very little. Part of a feminist narrative approach involves listening to the silences in any story, so the next chapter will explore the things left unspoken, namely, gender.

²²⁶ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 225.

Chapter 5

Folktales, Faith, and Gender

Feminist theorists have critiqued many fairy tales and folklore for espousing misogyny and patriarchal values oppressive to women. In her seminal book in gender studies, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir said, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”²²⁷ She was pointing out the process by which little girls are socialized to uphold the ideals of femininity—ideals that both flatter and humiliate them at the same time.²²⁸ From the time they play with dolls, little girls receive implicit messages that they are to be passive, pampered, and pretty objects of admiration.²²⁹ As they receive constant feedback on their appearance and compare themselves with princesses and fairies from fairy tales, little girls learn to please others through their external appearance and submission.

De Beauvoir names a myriad of these narratives from the Bible to fairy tales. For example, many female characters in the Bible depend on stronger and powerful male figures. Eve does not stand on her own but comes into existence from Adam’s side to be his helper.²³⁰ Ruth becomes complete when she finds her husband; Esther kneels in submission to a powerful king.²³¹ In Anderson’s *The Little Mermaid*, the mermaid’s fate is to immediately lose her voice as a woman and to sacrifice her life for the happiness of her prince. Snow White and Sleeping Beauty both lay inert and asleep before their prince charming comes to rescue them.

²²⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books), 283.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 295.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 293.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 303.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 303.

These gender roles and values appear in Korean folklore as well.²³² Many Korean folktales convey Confucian ideals of gender, portraying female characters in rigid roles of daughters, wives, and mothers.²³³ The famous folktale of Shim Cheong, the blind man's daughter provides a close look into Korean Confucian ideals of filial piety and gender binaries that serve as educational tools for Korean girls and women. I provide the basic storyline here as a story paints a vivid picture of what it is like for women to live out these ideals and also because the gender themes in the folktale strongly paralleled gender themes from my participants' life stories. Deconstructing Shim Cheong's story will help illumine how folktales can reflect cultural memory as well as reinforce gender values and assumptions in actual women's lives.

The Tale of Shim Cheong, the Blind Man's Daughter

The tale of Shim Cheong begins with a poor and beautiful girl named Shim Cheong, whose mother died soon after she was born. Her father was blind, so Shim Cheong worked hard to make ends meet for the family from a young age. She refused to marry in order to take care of her father. The villagers all praised Shim Cheong for her beauty, work ethic, and devotion to her father.

One day, a Buddhist monk tells her blind father that he would regain his eyesight if he offers three hundred sacks of rice to the temple. While this would be financially impossible for them, Shim Cheong is determined to find a way to procure the price for her father's eyesight. When Shim Cheong hears that some sailors are willing to buy a girl for an annual sacrifice that would appease the Dragon King of the East Sea, she gladly offers to be the sacrifice in exchange for three hundred sacks of rice. The sailors marvel at her filial piety.

²³² Practical theologian Christine Hong provides a helpful analysis of the use of Korean folktales as tools of gender education in the lives of Korean American women. See Christine J. Hong, *Identity, Youth, and Gender in the Korean American Church, Asian Christianity in the Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 15-23.

²³³ Sung-Ae Lee, "Re-Visioning Gendered Folktales in Novels," *Asian Ethnology* 68, no. 1 (2009): 132.

Shim Cheong lies to her father about the ultimate arrangement she made in exchanging her life for his eye sight. She sets out to sea and bravely sacrifices herself into the turbulent waters, dressed in a colorful wedding *hanbok*.²³⁴ Sadly, Shim Cheong's father remains blind even after offering 300 sacks of rice and grieves his continued blindness and the loss of his daughter.

Meanwhile, Shim Cheong sinks underwater into the realm of the Dragon King of the East Sea. Her devotion to her father touches the Dragon King's heart, who sends her back to land in a giant lotus blossom. The giant blossom reaches the king, who opens it to find beautiful Shim Cheong inside. The king marries Shim Cheong, and she requests the king to open a banquet and invite all the blind beggars in the country. The king grants her request, and she finds her father at last. Upon their tearful reunion, her father's eyes open miraculously. Shim Cheong and her father live happily ever after.

The tale of Shim Cheong carries many moral and social lessons for Korean women. Children are to care and provide for their ailing parents just as Shim Cheong tirelessly works to provide for her father. Women must work diligently and give of themselves for the happiness and well-being of her family like Shim Cheong, who was willing to give up her life for her father's recovery. Shim Cheong soothed her father's worries and hid the truth about the personal price she had to pay in exchange for his well-being. In this way, virtuous children and women hide their suffering in silence to protect their loved ones from heartbreak or unease. Self-sacrifice and marriage are the prominent ways through which women can change their destinies, just as Shim Cheong offered herself to the Dragon King and married the king. In marriage or in death, Shim Cheong was always beautiful. She dressed herself in a colorful wedding *hanbok* when she jumped into the sea to offer herself as a sacrifice. When she met the king in a giant lotus blossom, she won his heart with her beauty. Likewise, girls must always strive to be beautiful, even unto death. The males, on the other hand, like

²³⁴ Hanbok refers to a Korean traditional dress.

the Dragon King and the king, possess the power to grant favor and happiness to women, particularly to beautiful and devoted women who fulfill their filial duties faithfully like Shim Cheong. Just as she never lost sight of her father's well-being in death and in the king's palace, women must look out for their father's health and happiness. In short, Shim Cheong is the ideal Korean daughter and wife who embodies beauty, submission, obedience, hard work, and self-sacrifice.

Confucian Influences on Gender Norms in Korean Society

The gender values and ideals in the tale of Shim Cheong reflect the significant influence of Confucianism on Korean society. I will briefly touch on the larger historical and political underpinnings of Confucianism in Korea as a window into Korean women's experiences of gender.

Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.) was a Chinese philosopher whose vision of social harmony entailed structuring the society in a hierarchical system of relationships.²³⁵ The family was the "prototype"²³⁶ of the society at large, meaning that a well-regulated family unit that fulfills ethical and moral responsibilities rippled out in peace and order for society as a whole. Some of the key Confucian ethical and moral responsibilities involve loyalty and filial piety. Loyalty pertains to the submission and obedience of inferiors to superiors in recognition of their moral uprightness, and filial piety pertains to the duty of children to respect, obey, and honor their parents and ancestors. Stratified by gender, age, and class, a Confucian hierarchical structure provides powers and privileges to males and the ruling class while maintaining order among subjects.²³⁷

Confucianism became a significant part of Korean culture when General Yi Seong Gye (1335-1408) overthrew the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392) to establish the last kingdom in Korea, the

²³⁵ Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *The Grace of Sophia: A Korean North American Women's Christology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002), 50.

²³⁶ Kyoung Ja Hyun, "Sociocultural Change and Traditional Values: Confucian Values among Koreans and Korean Americans," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 25, no. 2 (2001): 205.

²³⁷ Ibid.

Joseon Dynasty. When General Yi came into power as King Taejo (1392-1910), he used Confucianism to weaken the previous kingdom's powerful Buddhist ruling class with a new Confucian elite.²³⁸ King Taejo seized former Buddhist leaders' temples and lands and established Confucian religion, philosophy, and aristocrats in their place.²³⁹

The Joseon dynasty became the last kingdom in Korea, and its profound influence in shaping modern day Korea persists in different forms. The ruling elite, for example, has shifted from aristocracy at birth to measuring one's social status through academic credentials and financial security.²⁴⁰ Hierarchies based on gender and age remain in the Korean language and social etiquette, such as addressing people with different nouns, verbs, and body postures that correspond with one's social position. In a parent-child relationship, for example, the "hierarchical protocol"²⁴¹ calls for children of all ages to obey and respect their parents. This protocol can be restricting and emotionally straining for parent-child relationships when children feel like they have to suppress their wishes and opinions out of respect and deference for their parents. Parents may feel that their children are being selfish and rude when their children do not adhere to hierarchical norms of obeying and respecting parents' wisdom and guidance. While this protocol has loosened a lot over time and many Korean parents make room for their children's opinions, it still presents a significant source of emotional stress and friction within many Korean families.

Folklore, infused with Confucian gender values, gets passed down from generation to generation, transmitting cultural memories and codifying them in Korean social ethics. While listening for gender themes in participants' life stories, I was reminded of the story of Shim Cheong

²³⁸ Kim, *The Grace of Sophia: A Korean North American Women's Christology*, 47.

²³⁹ For historical and social contexts of the introduction of Confucianism into Korea, see John Duncan, "The Korean Adoption of Neo-Confucianism: The Social Context," in *Confucianism and the Family*, ed. Walter Slote and George DeVos (Albany, NY: State of New York Press, 1998), 75-90.

²⁴⁰ Bok-Lim Kim and Eunjung Ryu, "Korean Families," in *Ethnicity & Family Therapy*, ed. Monica McGoldrick, Joe Giordano, and Nydia Garcia-Preto (New York: Guilford, 2005), 349.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 351.

because many of the gender themes overlapped between Shim Cheong and the women's lives. Themes of filial piety, suffering in silence, desire to please parents and protect them overlapped, while there were points of divergence as my research participants had been socialized in several different countries.

“The Good Daughter” and Its Discontents

All three participants felt obligated to be a “good daughter” to their parents, particularly to their fathers. Vera, for example, felt a tremendous responsibility to be a good, first-born child and daughter. When their family moved to Russia, Vera craved attention from her parents, but she felt a responsibility to show them that she was doing well:

From my parents' perspective, I was making this transition really smoothly. I was doing everything okay. Cuz you know I was the elder, like the first child and I didn't know it then because I was young, but I thought I had to do well or something, you know, to make my parents proud.²⁴²

Even at a young age, Vera tried to protect her parents from her own troubles by showing how well she was adjusting to their transition to Russia. She kept her needs to herself and performed flawlessly until her body betrayed her, and she became sick. Even as she was recounting this story, Vera expressed remorse for the trouble she caused her parents by becoming sick. While her sickness was a combination of a cry for attention and actual symptoms of illness, Vera regretted getting sick because she believed she had failed to protect her parents from added stress. Reflecting on that part of her life, Vera called herself, “*Bul-hyo-nyub*,” which is a Korean word for a daughter who fails to honor her parents. It is the opposite of the word that usually describes the devoted, filial daughter *Hyo-nyub* Shim Cheong.

²⁴² Vera, Interview by author, October 13, 2016

Although Vera described herself as a *bul-hyo-nyuh*, she caused little trouble to her parents throughout her adolescence. Even when Vera spent her six years of her adolescence away from her mother while her mother was being treated in Korea, she remained a good daughter, not causing any trouble. Her parents thought that her adolescent years went so smoothly, but Vera's way of working things out was retreating into herself:

So my parents even until this day think I had a very quiet puberty, you know. I almost had no puberty or something. I was always this good girl. But I was internalizing everything I think. So yeah, I kept quiet. In chapter two, I was saying that I adapted to Russian culture and Russian people very quickly. At first, I was really homesick, but I soon just adapted. I just accepted it. But in Act 3, I was just pushing everything out. So I kind of stopped hanging out with my Russian friends, I mean, I would have fun with them when we get together, but not too much. I didn't really seek them. I'd rather be alone and read. Or draw or something. Or listen to music by myself and play the piano.

Vera kept up her role as a good daughter, but she dealt with stress by retreating into her own world of art, music, reading, drawing, or playing the piano.

The most poignant example of friction between Vera's filial piety and her individual wish came up in the decision-making process about her college. When her father strongly urged her to go to college in Korea, Vera recoiled at the idea of going back. However, as a good Korean daughter might do, she did not express this directly. But what she could not express directly to her father, she overheard her father's friend say, "Isn't that kind of cruel to send her to Korea?" The word *cruel* captured what she truly felt, and she tried to communicate this by telling her father half-jokingly that it was "cruel" to send her to Korea. Part of the etiquette of filial piety is not challenging one's parents directly in disagreement. So instead, she playfully joked around that it was "cruel" of him so as to deescalate possible tension. She also suggested other alternatives but her father remained resolute in his decision to send her to Korea. This unilateral decision resulted in Vera suffering in silence before leaving Russia, on the plane, and on the way to her new home in Korea. In these ways, Vera exemplified the prototype of the good, eldest daughter who hardly deviated from the

codes of filial piety. She worked hard, caused no trouble, protected her parents from her own negative emotions, and suppressed her own wishes out of respect for her father.

Similarly, Sophia followed the script of being a good, first-born daughter with tendencies of performing the role of a firstborn son. Sophia fulfilled her duties by excelling in academics, though I do not think she consciously thought about doing well in school as fulfilling her duty to be the good eldest daughter. She stated that she felt an overwhelming drive to be the best in everything. While there may be various reasons behind her motivations, such as securing acceptance through her achievements, the narrative of the good eldest daughter may have been embedded within her environment and played a role in her drive to excel in all things.

Another factor that might have played into her desire to be best at everything may have been a desire to overcompensate for the fact that she was born a girl when her father would have preferred a firstborn son. In a Confucian hierarchy, the father is at the top and the son comes second because the son carries on the family line. Sophia knew that her father wanted a son and in some ways tried to meet her father's expectations:

There was always this, I knew my dad had always wanted a son. And so he would say things like, "If you were a son, I would have made you take Taekwondo. Or if you were a son, I would have been tougher with you. Or if you were a son whatever. I think I grew up not consciously but wanting to fill that role as a son. And so, yeah, I finally succeeded in that in my late twenties when I was helping my dad build stuff and renovate things. He would just call me, "Son." You know, "You're like a son." You know, "우리 아들."²⁴³

Sophia straddled two worlds, first as a responsible, eldest daughter, and second, as the firstborn son that her father never had. Whether consciously or unconsciously, she strove to fulfill these expectations by excelling in school and learning to do things that traditionally a son might have done, such as building and renovating with her father.

On the other hand, Sophia diverged from Confucian values of a good daughter by refusing to suppress her emotions for family harmony. For example, she challenged her father and they

²⁴³ Korean for "My son." Literal translation, "Our son." Interview by author, Sophia, November 9, 2016.

clashed constantly in her adolescence. When she was thirteen years old, her father presented her with a plan for her life that she should follow, which involved going to college and paying for it herself. By this time, she was attending public school in the U.S., where children are often encouraged to explore and discover their own academic and vocational interests. Sophia felt constricted and burdened by her father's expectations, which mixed two cultural narratives in his attempt to guide Sophia. From a Korean Confucian hierarchical role relationship, he was prescribing how Sophia should live her life to attain important status markers of education and financial security. Yet he set forth his case by appealing to the American value of independence, saying, "Well, we're in America now, and America is the land of independence. And I am not gonna be like these Korean parents who work and bend over backwards to send their kids to college. You figure it out."²⁴⁴ He mixed the American cultural concept of independence with Korean Confucian filial piety and expected Sophia to obey him without question. Out of his own insecurity and anxiety surviving as an immigrant in the U.S., he urged his daughter to be prepared to carry the weight and responsibility of her own education and success. However, Sophia was too young and was being schooled in an American education system where she was developing her own voice. These mixed cultural narratives and misunderstandings resulted in a volatile cocktail of emotional outbursts between Sophia and her father. Sophia's father took her negative responses as disobedience and disrespect toward him, while Sophia resented that her father made no room for her wishes and burdened her with premature autonomy. Their strained father-daughter relationship continued throughout her adolescence until the physical distance between home and college granted Sophia some respite from pressures at home.

²⁴⁴ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

Eirene also happened to be the good, responsible, eldest daughter who obeyed her parents most of her life. In fact, when I asked what wisdom she might share with younger TCK children and youth, she said, “You don’t have to listen to everything your mom and dad says.”²⁴⁵ The subtext in her comment reveals Eirene’s own compliance to her parents throughout most of her life and a wish that she had not followed that script so strictly. The reason why Eirene had followed the Confucian filial piety script without much trouble was that she had not been consciously aware of how gender made any difference in her life until she went to Korea during the latter half of her twenties. Although she had read some feminist theology books during seminary in the U.S., the readings were so marginal in the curriculum that she could never find time to get to them. It was hard enough to get through required readings of Calvin, Barth, and Tillich that she barely had time for liberation and feminist theology readings. The only memory she had of feminist theology was from a conversation with an Asian American male colleague who brought up feminist theology with her:

He was the first one who talked about feminist theology and how Adam and Eve’s story, the eating of the apple was a liberation somehow and I was like, “What? There’s no sin? There’s no concept of sin at all? The original sin is not pride but—for women, it’s not pride, but I don’t know what. And the rethinking sacrifice and calling God a Goddess. Wow, that was heretical.”²⁴⁶

Issues of gender or feminism felt so foreign and “heretical” to her during seminary. The development of Eirene’s gender consciousness was slow, in part due to her conservative evangelical faith background and a Eurocentric curriculum that pushed feminist thought and scholars of color to the margins. Her seminary’s implicit curriculum communicated what was “essential” and at the “center,” making feminist theology seem “heretical” and foreign to her lived experiences.

But when she came to Korea in her mid-twenties, she felt the societal pressure for women to get married and how limited career opportunities were for women. Recent hate crimes had raised

²⁴⁵ Eirene, Interview by author, October 26, 2016.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

public awareness about misogyny in Korea, such as the incident in May 2016 when a man stabbed a woman to death in a public bathroom. The woman was a complete stranger to him, but he had targeted her out of his hatred against women. Such incidents heightened public awareness and protests surrounding misogyny in Korea, and Eirene began to give more serious thought to how gender shaped her life. In her doctoral program, she studied about “society, community, nation-ness, and political issues,” which led her to think about women as “political identities” and to pay attention to gender equality issues.²⁴⁷ She became conscious of how limited women are in Korean churches and society and how gender shaped her social interactions and identity—“how other people look at me and the way I perceive myself, the opportunities that I give myself, or my fears of how others see me.”²⁴⁸ Eirene’s story demonstrates a slow progression in her perception of gender and its impact in her life. She had not given much thought to how gender impacted her life and identity until her late twenties when she became conscious of societal limitations on women and learned about gender issues through public protests and doctoral education.

The different development of gender and feminist consciousness in the women’s lives influenced how these women embodied or diverged from prescriptive gender narratives. For example, all three women embodied, to a certain extent, Confucian ideals of filial piety in fulfilling their duties as good first-born daughters. Sophia tried to please her father by being the good, eldest daughter and even trying to fulfill the imperfection of being born a woman by trying to become a “son” in line with patrilineal preference of sons over daughters. At the same time, American culture of cultivating independent thought and voice led her to clash with her father and diverge from the ideals of filial piety. Eirene was a good, eldest daughter who did not give much thought to gender until her late twenties when she began to actively renegotiate gender power relations to resist gender

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

oppressions. Vera, on the other hand, did not challenge prescriptive gender narratives but rather accepted them as the way things are or blamed her own shortcomings if she did not embody the narratives well enough. For example, she blamed herself for being unable to relieve her parents of additional emotional burdens when she became sick. She kept referring to herself as a *bul-hyo-nyuh* for getting sick and wanting attention, despite the fact that she probably best exemplified the ideal filial daughter who never caused trouble and brought honor to her family through academic success and prestigious career. Vera also did not perceive Russian norms of femininity as oppressive, even though societal pressure for women to be thin had led her and many of her friends to struggle with body image issues. She had internalized Korean filial piety and Russian norms of femininity to the point that they did not seem oppressive.

It is not surprising that Vera did not feel oppressed by the gender norms that prescribed how she was to behave and present herself as a woman. Following these norms was a way for her to survive and find belonging. For example, Vera said that people were more nurturing and kind toward her because she was a woman. Sophia echoed these thoughts, saying that being a woman made life easier when they were moving from country to country because people seemed more open and “softer” towards her as she represented a “nonthreatening identity.”²⁴⁹ The difference between Vera and Sophia was that Sophia interpreted people’s kindness and nurturing attitudes from a gender power-relations perspective. People were kinder to women because they represented non-threatening identities—characteristics similar to Shim Cheong and female protagonists in fairy tales, like passive, submissive, beautiful, and non-violent entities. Vera did not name such power relations, but she explained that there were advantages to being a woman in Russia. In particular, being a woman helped her avoid racist hate crimes by skinheads, who often targeted Korean men but rarely attacked Korean women.

²⁴⁹ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

Upon listening to her story, it became clear that simply being a woman did not guarantee safety from racial discrimination. One had to follow gender norms and be “feminine” enough to avoid racist harassment. Vera explained:

The skinheads did not really harass women. In some ways I had it easier because I was a woman in Russia. But even among the Korean women, if they were dressed sort of like a guy, like just wearing jeans and glasses and tying their hair back, then the skinheads would come chase them or something. Not hit them but intimidate them or something.²⁵⁰

This sort of harassment and policing reflects what Judith Butler describes as an “insidious and insistent practice” to reify gender binaries and to create artificial uniformity or “internal coherence” around gender identification.²⁵¹ Racism and sexism were at work to discriminate against people of color and to coerce women into performing a certain brand of femininity sanctioned by society. Butler describes gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”²⁵² The racist and sexist harassment of the skinheads is one example of how society rigidly regulates a certain style of femininity while punishing others. Over time, Vera became socialized to accept these norms as natural, and society reinforced these gender norms through language and culture. For instance, young women were called, “девушка,” or “young lady,” and they often received special treatment. When Vera would go out into the marketplace, people would hand her flowers and compliment her outfit:

If I’m wearing a dress, like a pretty dress, people would come up and compliment the dress, not ask me who I am. The more I presented myself as beautiful, people would compliment me on my looks not on my...or asking me who I am. I don’t know. May be that’s why I’m so obsessed with... I was like that once. When I was in Russia, when I was like in high school. Actually, Russian culture is like this on the whole. They’re obsessed with beauty. They’re obsessed with something beautiful. The society is like that. It’s a different kind of obsession from Korea. Something cultured, something elegant and beautiful and those values are really strong. [...] They’re reflected in the language. I wouldn’t call it oppression, but the ways girls should behave are set. Girls in the U.S. are so much freer. When Russian girls come to the U.S., they’re shocked. Girls are wild here.

²⁵⁰ Vera, interview by author, October 13, 2016.

²⁵¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2006), 33.

²⁵² Ibid.

Russian girls are more reserved. There's also Women's Day in Russia and all women receive flowers on that day. So I felt that I had it easier because I was born a woman and that being a woman helped me avoid racial discrimination. I still think that it's much easier being a woman living in foreign countries.²⁵³

The culture of rewarding young, beautiful girls with flowers echoes de Beauvoir's critique of the way society trains little girls to think that they are objects of admiration that must be pampered. Flattery, attention, and affirmation teach young girls implicitly and explicitly what is treasured most of all—external beauty and feminine, elegant behavior. Vera was socialized to enjoy the rewards of acceptance and hospitality by wearing pretty dresses, receiving compliments, flowers, and special attention. Perhaps this is why Vera said, "I wouldn't call [gender norms] oppression," even though Russian norms of beauty had led her to be so obsessed with beauty in the past. As a little girl, for instance, she had wanted longer eyelashes like the Russian children. In high school, many of her female friends were anorexic, and she had also struggled with being skinny for a short time. Despite these struggles, Vera remained positive about her gender for the special treatment that she received and the racial harassment that she was able to avoid.

Vera also noted that Russian norms and values are reflected in the *language*. Language is a site of a "complex set of social, historical and political conditions of formation."²⁵⁴ There is no such thing as "linguistic communism," meaning that the use of language or speech does not take place in a level playing field where everyone shares equal knowledge and "performance" of a homogenous language.²⁵⁵ In other words, linguistic practices emerged over time through history and struggle, particularly in colonial contexts, where certain languages were declared dominant while other

²⁵³ Vera, interview by author, October 13, 2016.

²⁵⁴ John B. Thompson, "Editor's Introduction," in *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1991), 5.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

languages were suppressed or eradicated.²⁵⁶ As such, language is not an innocent carrier of norms and values. The ideals of beauty and elegance reflected in language communicate power and inequality. By becoming fluent in Russian and adopting the norms reflected in the language, Vera tacitly accepted the privileges and status that come with the dominant and recognized language.²⁵⁷

Vera's tacit acceptance of gender norms and filial piety reminded me of themes from the tale of Shim Cheong. When Shim Cheong heard about the price of 300 sacks of rice for her father's recovery, she took it upon herself to pay that price and sacrificed her life to solve the problem. Similarly, Vera tried to protect her parents from her real emotions when their family was adjusting to life in Russia. In the process, she became ill. But reflecting on that period of her life, Vera blamed herself for getting sick and for not being more considerate of her parents. Rather than externalizing the problem and realizing that the context made it difficult for everyone, Vera internalized the problem and became disconnected from her own body for the sake of her parents' well-being.

What if we were to imagine alternative endings to Vera and Shim Cheong's stories? What if Shim Cheong had asked why her poor family had to pay 300 sacks of rice in the first place? Who benefited from this mandate? What did the Buddhist monk gain from the ridiculous price tag on the poor blind beggar's healing? When the sailors were looking to sacrifice a maiden to the Dragon King of the East Sea, why did no one question the injustice of young females having to be sacrificed, only

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ While I did not ask explicit questions in my interviews in relationship to the role of language in identity formation, here are a few studies for further discussion on the topic of language and TCK identity formation. In her doctoral dissertation, *Bibimbap: Identity Construction in Korean Third Culture Kids During Higher Education*, Megan Beard writes that language functions as a social currency and privileged status, especially in Korea. At the same time, TCKs' ability to speak English also separated them from their Korean peers, creating a stigma "if English fluency came at the expense of Korean fluency" (p.233). As a result, TCKs tended to use language as a tool to align themselves with certain cultural groups for belonging. See Megan I. Beard, "*Bibimbap: Identity Construction in Korean Third Culture Kids During Higher Education*" (Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2007). Danau Tanu is another TCK researcher who provides an in-depth postcolonial critique on the higher status attributed to the English language among TCKs at an international school in India. In chapter 5 of her dissertation, she delves into the socio-political privileges of speaking English without an accent and the colonial imprint of English as the official language of curriculum in supposedly "international" schools. See Tanu, "Unpacking "Third Culture Kids": The Transnational Lives of Young People at an International School in Indonesia," 85-107.

to repeat the annual ritual of the violence and rape of young girls? The tale of Shim Cheong is riddled with gender roles and scripts of filial piety and sexism. Critically questioning these kinds of narratives from a systemic perspective of gender power relations may help empower young girls like Vera to move away from taking on personal responsibility for systemic injustices to critically questioning systemic gender injustices.

Interestingly, Vera overcame her body image issues through her faith community, where she learned scripture verses that affirmed her body or de-centralized the importance of external appearance. Psalm 139, for example, affirmed that she was “fearfully and wonderfully made.” God’s words to the prophet Samuel in I Samuel 16:7, about how people look at the appearance but God looks at the heart, relieved Vera from the unrelenting societal gaze and regulation of her body. Vera’s faith community and narratives of faith helped her overcome negative body image issues. This points to the powerful potential of faith communities or biblical narratives to empower women with countercultural truths about their value and worth. However, Vera’s healing remained at a personal level and not a call to resist systemic oppression against women. God’s healing involved resolving Vera’s personal struggle with body image issues but remained detached from a prophetic commitment to feminist solidarity and gender justice.

Implications for Postcolonial, Feminist, and Narrative Pastoral Care

One of the ways that pastoral care practitioners can expand the possibility of personal and communal healing is to practice critically examining and re-interpreting cultural and faith narratives to include systemic understandings of gender dynamics and feminist solidarity. For example, pastoral care practitioners can discuss folktales and biblical narratives of women where women can freely ask questions about who benefits and who gets to hold power. A comparison of the tale of Shim Cheong with the biblical narrative of Ruth may be a thought-provoking exercise that tills the ground

for gender consciousness among young girls. Ruth had no place to belong in her society after her husband died, so questioning the fairness of women's marginal place in society would be a good place to begin. What are the implicit and explicit rules in society that determine women's place and belonging in society? In a way, Ruth was like Shim Cheong because of her hard work ethic and filial piety to her mother-in-law, Naomi. Just as Shim Cheong sacrificed herself for her ailing father and changed her fate by marrying the king, Ruth worked hard to make ends meet for her and Naomi. Ruth also changed her destiny by offering herself to a rich man in marriage, who in turn, cared for both Ruth and Naomi. Evaluating these characters' strengths, growing edges, and the potential repercussions of going "off-script" will help young girls become more fluent in reading their narrative environments around gender. In doing so, they will better discern cultural lies about "the ideal woman" and learn to be more grounded in who they are as they negotiate how they want to be in relationship with others.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored the explicit and implicit narratives around gender in the participants' life stories. Explicitly, Vera and Sophia pointed out that being female made their experiences moving from country to country easier. Vera did not see gender norms as oppressive as she was thankful to avoid racist harassment and appreciative of the special treatment she received as a young lady. Sophia attributed the special treatment to societal perception of women as non-threatening and subordinate. She was also aware of her conscious and unconscious effort to fulfill the role of an eldest son to her father and how she was socialized to serve the men in her life. As for Eirene, she became conscious of gender in her late twenties through doctoral education, public protests, and personal experiences as a woman living in Korea.

Aside from what the women stated explicitly, all three participants' life stories featured Korean Confucian ideals of filial piety, especially of the good, eldest daughter. These themes were

reminiscent of the folktale of Shim Cheong and its Confucian underpinnings that persist in the lives of Korean women today, even women who grew up in several different countries. However, the women's narratives diverged according to their level of gender consciousness and conflicting cultural values. For example, Sophia diverged from the good, obedient daughter when she clashed with her father due to mixed cultural narratives of Korean Confucian filial piety and American values of independence. Eirene, on the other hand, lived the role of the good, eldest daughter until she became more conscious of gender issues through education and life transition. Only then did she begin to negotiate gender norms and resist gender inequalities. It is important to note that Sophia and Eirene's gender consciousness grew in their late twenties through more explicit and centralized feminist education during their doctoral studies, not the marginal, androcentric, Eurocentric education they had received most of their lives. Moreover, the conservative evangelical faith background of the women was powerfully formative and healing in their identity formation but incredibly restricting in their gender consciousness. What difference would it have made if they had learned to deconstruct gender roles and scripts earlier in their lives? What if their faith communities, which were so influential in their identity formation, had created spaces for critical examination and deconstruction of gender in cultural and faith narratives? I will delve into the role of faith in their identity formation in the next chapter, but the slow development of gender consciousness in the participants' life stories points to an urgent need for pastors and faith educators to facilitate more intentional conversations about gender with young people. Particularly for TCKs, exploring and comparing biblical and cultural narratives would help them develop greater discernment to deconstruct oppressive gender narratives and to imagine more liberating and empowering alternatives as women of faith.

Chapter 6

Faith: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

All three participants claimed that their faith played a central and significant role in their identity formation and sense of belonging. While their internationally diverse upbringing contributed to painful and fragmenting experiences in identity formation, faith was the one common denominator that held together the fragmented pieces of themselves. Faith provided a meaningful narrative for their multiple relocations and offered stability, hope, affirmation, and empowerment in challenging and complex periods of their lives. While faith contributed significantly to their well-being, there were a few exceptions in their stories when faith was a source of guilt and gloom, casting a shadow over their lives. By reflecting upon these different roles and consequences of faith in the TCK women's search for self, this chapter explores potential significance and pitfalls of faith in TCKs' identity formation processes.

Defining religion, spirituality, and faith

Faith, spirituality and religion are terms that are often used together, sometimes interchangeably or in opposition to each other, so I briefly discuss prevailing definitions of these terms to explain how I use these words in this chapter to describe how faith formed the participants' identities. Putting into dialogue selected psychological and theological perspectives that represent different values and assumptions, I set the frame for how these conversations intersect and contrast with the women's own understandings of faith.

Definitions of religion, faith, or spirituality vary widely according to the values, assumptions, and biases of the people defining them. Freud, for example, said religion fulfills the wishful fantasies of the uneducated masses: "[religion] comprises a system of wishful illusions together with a

disavowal of reality, such as we find in an isolated form nowhere else but in amentia, in a state of blissful hallucinatory confusion.”²⁵⁸ Freud compared religion to “sweet—or bittersweet—poison from childhood onwards” that people relied on to mitigate their pain from the troubles of the world as well as “the full extent of their helplessness and their insignificance in the machinery of the universe.”²⁵⁹ Religion, for Freud, was an “illusion,” “hallucinatory confusion,” and “sweet/bittersweet poison”—the effects of which might be cured by reason and science. If people were better educated with reason and science, they would be better able to take control of their lives to meet their own needs rather than remain entrenched in infantile longings. As a foundational figure in psychology, Freud’s perspectives set the tone for a cautious and distant relationship between mental health professionals and religion.

Other theorists, like William James, conceptualized religion less judgmentally and more descriptively as “the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.”²⁶⁰ James thought that scientific inquiry should not neglect the world of the unseen and challenged the notion that science and rationality exhaust knowledge about all things real and true: “Apart from all religious considerations, there is actually and literally more life in our total soul than we are at any time aware of.”²⁶¹ To neglect the life of the soul because science cannot articulate its realities gives undue weight to empirical rationality, especially when considering that intuitions and instincts are often the indomitable forces steering the ship of the human mind:

Nevertheless, if we look on man's [*sic*] whole mental life as it exists, on the life of men [*sic*] that lies in them apart from their learning and science, and that they inwardly and privately follow, we have to confess that the

²⁵⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and Its Discontents, and Other Works*, vol. XXI, *Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* (1927), 43.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁶⁰ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Auckland: Floating, 1902), 78.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 711.

part of it of which rationalism can give an account is relatively superficial. It is the part that has the prestige undoubtedly, for it has the loquacity, it can challenge you for proofs, and chop logic, and put you down with words. [...] If you have intuitions at all, they come from a deeper level of your nature than the loquacious level which rationalism inhabits. Your whole subconscious life, your impulses, your faiths, your needs, your divinations, have prepared the premises, of which your consciousness now feels the weight of the result; and something in you absolutely KNOWS that that result must be truer than any logic-chopping rationalistic talk, however clever, that may contradict it.²⁶²

James was therefore interested in the realm of people's intuitions, faiths, and religious experiences. If psychology could take seriously the unseen but powerful existence and workings of the subconscious, science should inquire into the uncharted realities of religious experiences that significantly influence people's inner and outer worlds.²⁶³

Kenneth Pargament is one such contemporary psychologist who studies the complex relationship between psychology and religion. Pargament does not feel the need to reduce religion's functions to defense mechanisms that coddle human beings in their anxiety. Rather, religion makes room for human limitations in understanding and agency. Pargament describes the distinction this way:

The psychological world says that we are not as powerless as we imagine ourselves to be; we have resources within ourselves that can be tapped more fully. The religious world says that in fact we are powerless in important ways and that we must look past ourselves alone for answers to important questions. I am suggesting, in a very general way, that the psychological world helps people extend their personal control, while the religious world helps people face their personal limitations and go beyond themselves for solutions.²⁶⁴

In other words, psychology leans more toward uncovering human agency and potential, while religion recognizes the limits of human agency and imagines human restoration and hope in partnership with the divine. While psychology and religion approach healing and health differently, their approaches are not mutually exclusive. For instance, in psychotherapy, *extending the circle of care* beyond the therapist-client dyad means inviting the participation of loved ones, family, and others who may support the client's desires for change. In religion, a similar support from loved ones,

²⁶² Ibid., 107-108.

²⁶³ Ibid., 711.

²⁶⁴ Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice* (New York; London: Guilford, 1997), 8.

family, and faith community may be present, along with an awareness that God is also present with a love and faithfulness that strengthens the community in and beyond their abilities. The two caring responses are not contradictory; the latter searches for the sacred as another resource in creating change in the world. Religion does not simply bury its head in the sand out of anxiety and look to the divine in helplessness. While such religious responses may exist, it certainly cannot describe all facets of religion. Thus, Pargament argues that religion deserves a closer look from various angles—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and it does not need to be labeled solely as poison, infantile longings, or a stubborn set of dogma masquerading as truth. Religion is much more than these, and there may be a lot to gain from bridging psychological and religious perspectives on practices of care.²⁶⁵ This is the approach that I use to reflect on the women’s stories, integrating psychology, theology, and TCK women’s experience to better understand the relationship between their faith and identity formation.

Religion, spirituality, and faith are closely related terms with multifaceted meanings for different people. In care and counseling fields, “spiritual” often refers to a more inclusive, broader sense of beliefs, practices, and experiences not necessarily tied to a specific religion. “Spiritual care,” for instance, sounds more inclusive than “pastoral care,” since the word “pastoral” has roots in Judeo-Christian image of a shepherd caring for sheep.²⁶⁶

In popular usage of the terms *religion* and *spirituality*, studies reveal that people tend to separate religion from spirituality.²⁶⁷ People generally associate the term religion with dogmas, rituals, and institutions. Spirituality, on the other hand, can connote a more personalized, fluid search for positive values and experiences, such as gratitude, love, and feelings of connection with

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 9.

²⁶⁶ Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 6.

²⁶⁷ Kenneth I. Pargament, ed. *Apa Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2013), 11.

transcendence.²⁶⁸ Pargament rejects this dichotomy between *religion* as institutional doctrines, traditions, and rituals and *spirituality* as a more inward, personalized pursuit and sense of the sacred. This trend of individualistic, personalized spirituality reflects western individualism and psychology in the U.S. that neglect the importance of larger contexts embedded in spirituality. Furthermore, the binary between religion and spirituality does not hold up well since “virtually every element of the ‘new spirituality’ is familiar to traditional organized religions.”²⁶⁹ People can be both religious and spiritual, and not all institutional expressions of religion are void of the typical elements sought in “spirituality.” In view of these multivariant religious expressions and functions, Pargament defines religion broadly “as a process, *a search for significance in ways related to the sacred.*”²⁷⁰ The idea of religion as a *process* recognizes that religions change and shift in social, institutional, personal, traditional, and nontraditional contexts over time. His emphasis on people’s “search for significance in ways related to the sacred” includes both helpful and destructive aspects of religion in people’s search and sense of the divine.²⁷¹ Rather than reduce religion to social and psychological moods and motivations, Pargament’s definition leaves room for an appreciation of mystery, the incomprehensible, and the limits of science and reason.²⁷²

Keeping in mind the shared points of contact between religion and spirituality, we can say that in terms of context, “religion is more circumscribed than spirituality.”²⁷³ Religion is situated within “longstanding institutions” whose purpose is to support people’s relationship with the

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 11.

²⁶⁹ Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice*, 38.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 32.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 39.

²⁷² Ibid., 8.

²⁷³ Pargament, *Apa Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, 16.

transcendent.²⁷⁴ Spirituality, on the other hand, may be integral to religion, but it can also be present outside of organized religious contexts.²⁷⁵

Now we turn to definitions of faith according to James Fowler, a theologian whose seminal work on faith and development has important implications for faith and identity formation. In the *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Fowler points out that religion and faith are often used interchangeably. He differentiates religion and faith by saying that religion is the “cumulative traditions” of the past that have developed over time to commemorate and “communicate” a people’s relationship with the sacred and how people ought to be in relationship with the divine and with one another.²⁷⁶ These religious expressions can include rituals, narratives, myths, scriptures, music, symbols, prayers, dances, teachings, space, and many other forms that arise from people’s *responses* to the sacred. *Religious faith* refers to people’s *responses* as nurtured and inspired in the “interplay of the cumulative tradition and their experiences of the holy.”²⁷⁷ Thus faith is personal and communal response and commitment in relation to the transcendent.²⁷⁸

Fowler expands on this notion of faith in four broad strokes. First, he describes faith as a fundamental “dynamic of trust and loyalty” essential for developing self and relationships.²⁷⁹ Drawing on Erikson’s first developmental stage, *trust vs. mistrust*, Fowler argues that some degree of faith is necessary for babies at birth to intuit a world that is caring and trustworthy. This faith is the basis for all human beings as they develop selfhood and relationships with others.²⁸⁰ Second, “faith as a wholistic way of knowing and valuing” describes a way of seeing, imagining, knowing, and

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ James W. Fowler, "Faith/Belief," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Rodney Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 394.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 395.

acting in relation to a transcendent dimension.²⁸¹ Faith prioritizes what is most meaningful and worthy of worship and reorders meaning, purpose, joy, and hope in relation to the divine.²⁸² Third, “faith as a response to the gift of divine grace” highlights Christian understandings of grace as a radical, divine gift that interjects human conditions of alienation, destruction, and meaninglessness. Without God’s gift of liberating, healing, and transformative grace, human beings wander aimlessly and helplessly in a state of alienation.²⁸³ Finally, “faith as assent and commitment to truth” points to an acceptance and willingness to live according to God’s revealed truths, promises, and will.²⁸⁴

These brief descriptions of religion, spirituality, and faith from Western psychological (and theological) perspectives suggest that these terms are intricately related. Depending on the scholar’s beliefs and assumptions, religion may be wishful fantasies or “wholistic ways of knowing and valuing.” I wish to move away from a reductionistic definition of religion, faith, and spirituality and leave open different possibilities for religion’s significance and function as narrated by the women. The point here is not to judge the veracity of religious claims but to pay attention to the meanings women make about the role of faith in their identity formation.

Fowler’s definitions of faith provide a helpful framework for organizing the different threads in the participants’ stories of how faith shaped their lives. While his definitions do not cover all of their themes on faith, they offer a helpful starting point. I use the term faith over religion or spirituality for several reasons. All three participants represented one religion, Protestant Christianities. To be more specific, they came from Korean conservative evangelical backgrounds, where the word *faith* tends to be used over *religion* or *spirituality* to refer to their religious beliefs, experiences, and communities. One reason why the participants used the word *faith* over *religion* and

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid., 396.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

spirituality may be because they were interviewing with a researcher, whom they knew to also be Protestant Christian. In conversing with a person of the same religion, they may not have felt the need to talk about their “religion,” as if they were talking to someone unfamiliar with Christianity. Moreover, using the word “faith” may have reflected an ingrained *habitus*²⁸⁵ within conservative evangelical Christians communities, where faith is a central and vital subject matter. Evangelical Christians’ monotheistic commitment to “the one true God” and the emphasis on placing one’s faith in Jesus Christ may be reflected in the central usage of the word “faith” in conversations about spiritual and religious matters.

Following the participants’ lead, I will also use the term *faith* in discussing my findings, with the understanding that faith, religion, and spirituality are intricately connected. When speaking about the women’s religious communities, I will refer to them as their faith communities, church, Christian fellowship or name their denomination affiliation.

1) *Faith as the foundational element for selfhood and relationships*

Drawing on Erikson’s developmental stages, Fowler identified faith as the foundational element that makes human life and relationships possible. Many developmental psychologists believe that babies are born utterly dependent on their caregivers to build the basic structures of experience in their lives. For example, caring physical and emotional attention teaches babies to trust that the world is a safe place that is responsive to their needs. However, if the babies experience severe physical and emotional deprivation, they may learn to distrust their caregivers and find it challenging to sustain relationships and hope.

²⁸⁵ I am referring to Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of *habitus* as internalized “tendency,” “inclination,” and “ways of being” that embody socialization processes. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University, 1977), 214.

Eirene's story showed that a faith community can function like a primary caretaker that builds or breaks down trust by the kind of spiritual nurture s/he provides. For example, Eirene was profoundly influenced by her conservative Korean church's teachings on hell and the apocalypse. According to her church's theology, the rapture would take place at any moment. In the rapture, "real" Christians would be taken up into the sky while the rest would live through a torturous period of tribulation and trial. Family members would disappear in the rapture; cars would crash in the middle of the road. Christians left behind would have to defend their faith unto death in a world controlled by the Antichrist. This kind of theology in her early childhood cast an apocalyptic gloom in Eirene's life, taking away her sense of safety and stability in the world.

She was also terrified of hell after she learned about it in Sunday school:

So I grew up in church. I don't remember this, but my grandma had told me when I was three, four, five years old, I came back one time from Sunday school and was crying and I was like, "Do everybody who don't believe in God go to hell?" I was really devastated. There was also a time when I was always afraid of hell, like the apocalypse. Jesus is coming back at the end of the year and will I go to heaven or hell? There was always a question.²⁸⁶

Her church sowed seeds of fear and anxiety in her early childhood years that impacted her ability to perceive herself and relationships with others with security and stability. This sense of instability was exacerbated by the limited time she spent with her parents, who had to work. Eirene stayed with her grandparents, and her parents would come to visit two or three days at a time. Even though her grandparents were loving, Eirene felt insecure and anxious about who would take care of her if her grandparents died. She wondered if there would ever come a day when she would permanently be with her parents.

Even when Eirene finally got to live with her parents in Indonesia, she struggled with a sense of impermanence after moving to a new country. This instability went hand in hand with images of

²⁸⁶ Eirene, Interview by author, October 26, 2016.

hell and rapture, impacting Eirene's imagination into her early teenage years. She recalled her thought processes at the time:

And then in Indonesia and during middle school years, I remember thinking, 'Oh, what if the rapture happens right now?' Dad is driving. It would happen at dusk. It would always happen around dusk time, you know, that mood is set. I'll be on the back seat, mom and dad on the front, and my brother is beside me, and then I would suddenly think, 'What if the rapture happens now?' I'm the only one left in the car. Then I would quickly go up to the driver's seat and pull the handle and open the side. It was when the apocalypse books, the fiction, those books really came out a lot, 90s, mid- to late-90s.

Fears about her status in the rapture and insecurities about going to hell cast a gloom in the way she moved through the world. Insecurities and fear undermined her trust and confidence in herself. She was also not sure that her closest relationships or world around her would be stable. These fears seem congruent with Fowler's cautions about certain religious teachings that can negatively impact children at their early stages of faith. In his *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Fowler drew on Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erikson's developmental theories as well as interviews with hundreds of adults and children to outline seven stages of faith development. In one of the early stages, the *intuitive projective faith* stage (ages 2-6), Fowler described children's imaginations as "fluid," "magical," and lacking logic.²⁸⁷ Children at this age absorb symbols, images, and stories that enrich their imaginations and "intuitive feelings and understandings" about the sacred.²⁸⁸ He cautioned, however, that introducing destructive and punitive images or stories of God at this stage may leave lasting and damaging impressions on children. In Eirene's case, her church's terrifying images of the end times and hell powerfully persisted in her mind, undermining her faith, trust, and hope in herself and the world.

Pastoral theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore has also written on the topic of nurturing children and Christian developmental approaches to children and sin. She points out societal

²⁸⁷ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 123..

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

tendencies to romanticize children as innocent “blank slates” on the one hand and fully responsible sinners deserving punishment on the other.²⁸⁹ She argues for a Christian framework that does not fall prey to such polar perceptions of children as “wholly depraved and wholly innocent, villains and victims.”²⁹⁰ Rather, she highlights the importance of Christian spiritual formation that understands human failure and depravity but also presents possibilities for acknowledging wrongs and making amends.²⁹¹ Acknowledging failures does not necessitate overwhelming, incessant guilt, crippling shame, or spiraling despair. Rather, it calls for deeper religious and moral understanding, strategies to resist, possibilities for forgiveness, and new horizons of grace and freedom.²⁹² Such an approach aims to help children grow in their own moral and religious agencies as well as develop a balanced awareness of their shortcomings. Adults have a significant role in helping children develop their understandings about sin and grace in ways that empower them as spiritual and moral agents.²⁹³

In Eirene’s case, however, the Christian education at her church focused on hell, fire, and punishment for sin, leading young Eirene to feel a persistent insecurity, shame, and guilt about herself. Miller-McLemore cautions against teaching such an unbalanced punitive theology because even in early childhood, children can already struggle with fear and insecurity about the limits of their parents’ love and feel shame when they go against their parents’ explicit desires.²⁹⁴ Children need reassurances and reminders that their wrong actions do not translate into their worthlessness or rejection.²⁹⁵ Therefore, Miller-McLemore suggests that Christian approaches to teaching children

²⁸⁹ Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 66.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 68.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 60.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

about sin should make a place for understanding “human frailty” in the context of possibilities for resistance, compassion, forgiveness, and renewal.²⁹⁶

Since Eirene’s faith communities did not make adequate room for human frailty, she struggled with fear and anxiety that necessitated a dramatic, definitive conversion experience when she was twelve or thirteen years old. After countless prayers for forgiveness and prayers recommitting her life to Jesus, Eirene felt tired of feeling unsure if she was really saved. So her father helped her have a definitive moment of conversion through a ritual of writing down all her sins on a blank piece of paper. They prayed together, confessing sins and inviting Jesus Christ to be her Lord and Savior. After she ripped the piece of paper and threw it away, Eirene said that she felt a real sense of God’s love:

After that, it felt like I had a real sense of the love of God, of God's love for me throughout high school and junior high. I would go to God for my loneliness. I didn't really have a lot of friends, so spirituality would be my consolation.²⁹⁷

The repentance ritual helped Eirene finally find some peace regarding her eternal fate. She also experienced God’s love, which offered her real comfort and consolation in her loneliness when she did not have friends during adolescence.

A different kind of insecurity, shame, and fear crept up when she joined her college Christian fellowship. At a time when she felt lost in the “scary, faceless”²⁹⁸ Ivy League institution and insecure about her academic competence, the Christian fellowship offered a place where she felt like she belonged and mattered. At the same time, the Christian fellowship had its own subtle, markers of spiritual status, which reactivated Eirene’s insecurities. The members of the fellowship seemed extremely committed to their faith, advanced in their biblical knowledge, and seriously dedicated to missions:

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 67.

²⁹⁷ Eirene, Interview by author, October 26, 2016.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

Like I'm a pastor's kid, I'm a missionary's kid, but they know so much more of the Bible than I do. They're already so committed to missions, and some of them are like, "I'm praying about even the possibility of martyrdom. If God asks me to die for Him, will I be able to?" Like they were so serious about it and I was like, 'Wow.' I felt so inadequate.²⁹⁹

The conservative, evangelical theology at her fellowship must have pushed the idea of mission and martyrdom as the highest level of true discipleship and faith. Eirene felt behind in her biblical knowledge and uncertain about her commitment to die as a martyr. Even after she went to seminary, she still felt tormented by self-doubt and lack of confidence about her ministry and leadership abilities. For example, she struggled massively with feelings of inadequacy when she went on mission trips as a youth group chaperone. Youth group students much younger than her seemed way more confident and assured in the way they reached out to people, praying with authority and expecting miracles:

[...] but we went to that remote village in Guatemala and these youth kids and college kids and the leaders, they were so faithful to just pray, prophesized, listening to the Word of God and speaking out the prophecies, words of encouragement and that sort of thing. I felt like I have all these intellectual theological learning, but I don't have that kind of spiritual experiences. So yet again I felt like I'm such a child in that spiritual aspect, while I might've had that knowledge.

I'm not very good at speaking or teaching either. They were so much better because they had such experiences. They were encouraged to speak, not necessarily because they were trained but because they were told that they had something worthy to say in terms of spirituality or teaching the Word of God.

Eirene's description of the youth groups students and college student leaders' authority stood out to me: "They were encouraged to speak, not necessarily because they were [formally] trained [theologically] but because they were told that they had something worthy to say in terms of spirituality or teaching the Word of God."³⁰⁰

Eirene's comments reveal how important it may be for faith leaders to validate minoritized young people's words and actions as important and worthy. In a black and white racial binary where Asian American voices can often be silenced or ignored, these Korean American spaces of faith formation can affirm and nurture youths' authority and confidence in sharing truth, encouragement,

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

and healing. The Judeo-Christian scriptures affirm their identities as created by God to be in a loving relationship with God and the world. We see this relationship modeled in the bible, particularly through Jesus Christ, who called disciples who were ordinary women and men. Jesus sent the disciples out two by two, trusting them to preach the gospel and letting them know of some dangers involved— “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”³⁰¹ People may not always welcome them; they will need to discern their words and actions carefully.

Similarly, ministry with minoritized youth can be a place where ordinary teenagers can feel empowered to venture out in partnership with each other and God, risks included. There is always the danger that they may say or do the wrong thing or that they may face hostility. But faith leaders can do their best to create a “holding environment”³⁰² where young people can try out different ministries and learn from their mistakes or challenges they faced.

By “holding environment,” I am referring to the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott’s idea of space where a baby learns to play, imagine, and test out their subjective realities with the world around them. This concept provides an appropriate metaphor for nurturing children and youth in their faith formation. In Winnicott’s theory, the baby’s caregiver ideally makes room for the baby to play, create, and even destroy objects³⁰³ without fear of retaliation. In the space between subjective omnipotence (“the world revolves around me”) and objective reality (“there is a world that exists apart from me and my needs”), the baby initially thinks it can destroy what it created. But after repeated attempts of destroying and seeing the object survive without retaliating, the baby begins to recognize that the object exists in an objective reality outside of its imagination:

³⁰¹ Matthew 10:16, NRSV

³⁰² D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1987), 44.

³⁰³ The word *object* in object relations theory refers to the human connections that become the inner psychic structures representing the images, thoughts, and feelings internalized by children in early development.

If all goes well the infant can actually come to gain from the experience of frustration, since incomplete adaptation to need makes objects real, that is to say hated as well as loved.³⁰⁴

In this process, the baby grows in imaginative and creative interaction with the self and the world, exploring this interactive potential without undue fear.

Winnicott's concept of a holding environment provides an appropriate metaphor for faith formation. In fact, Winnicott referred to the arts and *religion* as "an intermediate area of experience, which is not challenged [...]," meaning a space between reality and imagination that encourages creativity.³⁰⁵ Like the baby that destroys the object and sees that it survived, young people should be given the space to play and test out the limits of theology in the presence of a caring community that will provide good enough care without retaliating or collapsing. For example, faith leaders can welcome honest expressions of disappointment, anger, doubt, or depression so that children and youth know that these emotions are normal and important in the life of faith. If Eirene's faith communities had given her space to imagine, play, and make mistakes without terrorizing, pressuring, or instilling punitive images of God at an early age, perhaps she would have learned to trust herself more and have confidence in God's unwavering love for her in all her strengths and weaknesses.

Splitting provides another perspective on the kind of holding environment faith communities can cultivate for young people. Splitting is a psychoanalytic term that describes the process of fragmentation which happens when one feels compelled to compartmentalize negative feelings or experiences as outside of oneself.³⁰⁶ Splitting describes the human tendency to view the world in black and white, good and bad because it feels too dangerous to tolerate the presence of both.³⁰⁷ In faith formation, splitting happens when we cannot accept both the positive and negative feelings in

³⁰⁴ D. W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena—a Study of the First Not-Me Possession," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953): 94.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁰⁶ Melanie Klein, "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 27 (1946): 101.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

ourselves or in our relationship with God. In such cases, people try to get rid of doubts, disappointments, or anger through various ways, such as denying them or trying to overcome them through various spiritual disciplines or rituals, such as prayer or exorcism. This kind of *split* theology breeds a holding environment where people feel obligated to create a false self that cannot show weakness or failure.³⁰⁸

Eirene's faith communities seemed to cultivate a split faith environment where the youth were encouraged to present a confident, spiritually authoritative aura and her college friends had a commitment-unto-death mentality. Unwavering confidence and fearless commitment can eclipse darker aspects of human experience, such as doubt, uncertainty, and ambiguity. If there is no place for these "normal" human experiences in the life of faith, young people infer that they must hide their feelings of fear, insecurity, or doubts or deny them altogether. Perhaps this is why Eirene felt so miserable hiding her feelings of uncertainty and insecurity in shame, since the rest of her faith community seemed so well put together, confident, and ultra-committed in their faith.

In summary, Eirene's faith community undermined her basic trust and faith in herself and in the world, leading to feelings of shame, self-doubt, and inferiority. Despite this rough start, Eirene did feel a real presence of God as a trusted, intimate companion in her loneliness during her high school years. When she entered college, her Korean American Christian fellowship offered a place of primary identity, belonging, and purpose when she found herself marginalized by race and class in the larger society. At the same time, she still struggled with feelings of envy, inferiority, and incompetence when she felt like she did not measure up to the kind of extreme self-sacrifice and confident convictions that people exuded in her Christian community circles.

³⁰⁸ The *false self* is Winnicott's term that refers to a defensive response when one's learns to hide one's core self and organize a compliant self that caters to impinging external forces. See D. W. Winnicott, "The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 41 (1960): 591.

2) *Faith as a wholistic way of knowing and valuing*

Faith as a wholistic way of knowing and valuing has to do with how people use faith in making meaning. According to Fowler, this meaning making involves “the power of imaging a coherent and meaningful ‘universe’ which gives purpose, joy, and hope to our lives in the midst of everyday relations, experiences, sufferings, losses, and gains.”³⁰⁹ The words “coherent and meaningful” universe make it seem that faith involves logical, rational, or consistent understandings of transcendence in relation to our daily lives. Faith, however, does not always need to be coherent to be meaningful. As process theologian James Poling says, God is ambiguous, meaning that God’s morality does not always make sense to our human minds.³¹⁰ Human judgements about God cannot capture the full reality of God. For every beauty and value that God and human beings work toward in the world, the realities of sin and evil in the world converge and collide. The resulting contradictions and complexities can frustrate straightforward understandings of God’s character or actions in the world. This is why I do not think that faith always involves a ‘coherent and meaningful universe.’

Knowing

Even though things may not always make coherent sense, faith provides a way of wholistic knowing that has “revelatory quality and power.”³¹¹ Wholistic knowing involves ways of knowing with intuitions, convictions, or images that cannot always be explained by words or reason. For example, Sophia experienced revelatory images and intuitions that powerfully shaped her identity and changed the course of her life at the lowest time of her life. When Sophia was dealing with

³⁰⁹ Fowler, "Faith/Belief," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 395.

³¹⁰ James N. Poling, *Rethinking Faith: A Constructive Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 23.

³¹¹ Fowler, "Faith/Belief," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 395.

depression and suicidal thoughts, she was able to hold onto life because of an inexplicable conviction of a revelatory image of *light* and a voice within her:

But I think the one thing that kept me on the side of life is not just faith but this incredible hope that – you know this is very cliché. The whole light at the end of the tunnel. But I could visualize it. Like in the midst of my darkness I could see that there's light in my future. And I'm like, huh, where am I getting this certainty from? But it was strong. It was as if it was saying, "Sophia, if you just get through this, your life is going to be so much better and so much more worthwhile and beautiful.

And I mean, that has to be faith in God. I mean, nothing else could have given me that kind of hope, because at that point in my life I couldn't see any.³¹²

The light at the end of a tunnel and the inner voice of hope are examples of how faith involves wholistic knowing. Comparative religion scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith's describes this kind of seeing and knowing:

[Faith] is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbor, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension.³¹³

Sophia was able to persevere in the mundane because she knew that the light and voice of hope were true. The image of light and voice of hope came to Sophia with a "revelatory quality and power,"³¹⁴ meaning that she did not try to conjure up some image. Rather, the image came to her and helped her see her life from a transcendent dimension.

Valuing

Faith provided countercultural values about the women's identities, bodies, and purpose in life. For example, Sophia found profound comfort in the value of her identity as a child of God. Having grown up in so many different places, she felt confused about who she was. First, her complex and diverse cultural experiences made belonging tricky as she did not quite fit neatly into

³¹² Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

³¹³ Wilfred C. Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1979), 12.

³¹⁴ Fowler, "Faith/Belief," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 395.

any group. She refused to be co-opted into the Korean American and Korean cultural divide. When she turned to white friends and became close to a white girl at school, people called Sophia a “sidekick,” implying her minor, inferior status compared to her main character white friend. At school, she was confused about her identity, and at home she went straight into defensive mode because of constant conflict with her father. The cultural clashes, family expectations, and language barrier at home left her struggling to protect whatever remnants she had of herself:

‘Cuz I feel like, yea, before college it was just, go, go go, go. And defend, defend, defend, protect, protect, protect, protect myself from being even more confused or broken down [...]. I didn’t have that room or space or time even to consider and ponder these identity questions that I finally could in college where I felt liberated.³¹⁵

Going away to college afforded Sophia some space at last to ask questions about who she was, and faith provided her a solid foundation:

What’s my voice sound like? Who am I? What do I like? What do I not like? [...] And having, I think, faith was what grounded me in thinking, “Well, I am a child of God and that is the only thing I can fully claim at that point at least. [...] Rather than, you know, what does it mean to be Korean, American, but growing up in all these different countries [...]. So I think faith was the grounding thing for me in my identity search.³¹⁶

Faith provided Sophia an immediate starting point in her search for self. She felt secure in her spiritual identity as a child of God. When she confided with some people in her Christian Fellowship that she had no idea who she really was, a senior girl sent her a huge list of “I am” statements that affirmed various aspects of her Christian identity. Statements, such as, “I am created in the image of God,” “I am a beloved child of God,” or “I am redeemed,” affirmed her identity and belonging in ways that touched her deeply and empowered her:

It was non-debatable. I didn’t have to argue for it or against it. It was just, “This is who I am, and this is how God created me, so this must be it.” And so I found a lot of comfort in that. [...] I felt very empowered and confident about being called this, you know, child of God and all these different things.

³¹⁵ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

These scripture verses affirmed her identity as a beloved child of God, which provided a strong countercultural message against other negative implicit and explicit messages about racial or ambiguous cultural identity. Being created in God's image was especially meaningful to Sophia since her independent and outspoken personality from a young age had been constantly at odds with the ideal of the submissive, obedient, good Korean daughter. No matter how "rebellious" she might have been in her parents' opinion, the scriptures affirmed that she was created by God and loved exactly for who she was. Affirming scripture verses powerfully uplifted Sophia's sense of self-worth, identity, and belonging.

Affirming scripture verses were deeply formative for Vera as well. When Vera was struggling with body image issues, Psalm 139:14 spoke a different truth to her about how beautifully and wonderfully she was created. I Samuel 16:7 made clear that human beings looked at external appearance, but God chose David by looking at his heart. These scriptures helped counteract cultural emphases on external beauty and pressures to be thin.

For Vera, her identity as a child of God came first and foremost before any other labels, even the term TCK. She felt that the term TCK was too broad to capture the complexities of individual lives and contrasting values. For example, she had met many TCK children of business people or diplomats in Russia, who never bothered to embrace Russian culture or language. They were simply on temporary business trips and did not feel it was necessary to learn Russian. Even some TCKs who stayed for five years chose to hang out only with foreigners. Vera, on the other hand, fully embraced what was given to her in Russia because of her Christian and missionary identity. Her priorities, values, and purpose in life came from her identity as a child of God, which strongly influenced the depth of openness and love she had for Russia and its people.

Vera's faith community in Korea and the Korean immigrant church she attended during doctoral studies impacted her sense of identity and purpose significantly. Leading bible study at her

church helped her recognize that she was more interested in teaching the bible than the political science material in her doctoral studies. When she was working as a political officer in Korea, her church community once again offered her a formative space that contrasted sharply from the principle driving forces of fancy external appearances, the bottom dollar mentality, and competition at her workplace. Serving intellectually-challenged young adults at her church showed her that she was more drawn to and fulfilled by the love, compassion, and rhythms of life promoted in Christian community. In these ways, Vera's faith community offered countercultural messages about her identity and worth, changing the course of her life direction and vocation.

3) Faith as divine gift of grace in human alienation

Comfort in loneliness

For each of the TCK women, faith was a source of love and consolation in their loneliness. Eirene stated that God helped soothe her loneliness. During junior high and high school, Eirene did not have many friends, so spirituality would be her consolation. In college, her Asian American Christian fellowship provided a place where she met friends that helped relieve some of her loneliness. She also remembers longing for an "immediate sense of the presence of God," an intense desire for the physical presence of God like in Psalm 63:1:

O God, you are my God, I seek you,
 my soul thirsts for you;
 my flesh faints for you,
 as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Looking back, Eirene interprets this bodily yearning as sublimated sexuality. Her conservative evangelical community did not give her space to explore her sexual needs, so these needs were expressed in a more socially acceptable form of longing for God's physical presence. In any case, faith provided some consolation and comfort in her loneliness, though it did not quite address her sexual needs.

Vera also came to rely on God more intensely in her mid-twenties when she needed comfort, love, and guidance. Before that, the rhythms and rituals of faith were so embedded in her family environment that she rarely thought about them. Praying before meals, attending family worship, or going to church on Sundays were simply second nature to her. Faith became significant when she was at important crossroads in her life and when she felt she did not have the internal resources to soothe her needs for love and attention. She explains: “I sought God because I was desperate and didn’t like the uncertainty. I needed to cling on something. Something more powerful and something wise.”³¹⁷

Before her mid-twenties, Vera had received love and attention through significant others or close friendships, but there came a point when she realized these were not enough. She felt it in her body as she experienced the same bodily aches that she had had since first grade, when she needed more love and attention from her parents. Although she felt blessed with good church communities, friends, and romantic relationships that fulfilled part of her longings, she still felt lonely because she found it hard to be vulnerable:

I had friends, of course, and I had church people, but maybe I was just too arrogant to express my vulnerability to some people. And so I thought of no one else but God.³¹⁸

One of the reasons why Vera needed to seek God was her need to be vulnerable. Vera had spent much of her childhood and adolescence on her own, independent, and taking care of her own problems through retreating inward. But at a certain point in her young adulthood, she ran out of her own emotional resources and did not feel comfortable expressing the depth of her vulnerabilities, needs, and fears to those around her. Especially when she grew apart from one of her boyfriends, she needed something else to fill that space. At this juncture when Vera was vulnerable

³¹⁷ Vera, Interview by author, October 13, 2016.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

and afraid, God met her personally. By this she meant that she experienced many answers to prayers and felt God speak to her through scripture. While God didn't make her loneliness totally go away, she experienced God's presence and love in many ways that felt deeply fulfilling.

I noted the similarities with Vera's difficulties being vulnerable and Sophia's difficulties opening up and trusting people. As a child of missionaries and pastor's daughter, it was ingrained in Sophia to help other people and to serve. Moving around so much and being in relationships as a pastor and missionary family led to betrayals or repeated relationship losses that took a toll on Sophia's willingness to be vulnerable or open with others. Sophia expressed some concerns regarding her relationships with people:

Wanting to help people. Wanting to be of service to them if possible. But incredibly hard to ask for help. It's also really hard for me to trust and open up to people. Because, yeah, I felt that lots of betrayals have happened before. And so it's hard for me to fully engage in that. But what's interesting is what I've noticed in my relationships is people around me feel that they're a lot more closer to me than I feel like I'm to them. And so they assume we're like really close friends. But from my perspective we're acquaintances. Right. And so it's weird. And so that makes me think am I not fully opening up to them and letting people in my life? Have I taken this wandering all my life to the point where even with relationships I'm wandering? Is there no home? But that's something that I think I'm still working on. Yeah.³¹⁹

Interestingly, Sophia was not fully aware of the reasons why some people felt closer to her while she did not feel the same way. These difficulties with vulnerability are not unique to Sophia or Vera.

Pollack and Van Reken explain that a highly mobile lifestyle can impact how TCKs create and maintain relationships.³²⁰ Saying goodbyes too often can make some TCKs reluctant to open their hearts. They may preemptively withdraw emotionally in order to protect themselves from the pain of separation.³²¹ Some TCKs may *seem* social, outgoing, or open because it is a skill that they have learned in order to adapt to new situations. For example, Vera had no problem making friends and being involved in a supportive community. Sophia also had many friends, but the discrepancy

³¹⁹ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

³²⁰ Pollack and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids*, 131.

³²¹ *Ibid*, 131.

between the level of intimacy she felt, as opposed to the greater depth of emotional intimacy perceived by many of her friends, signaled that she might be erecting emotional walls in her relationships without even realizing it.

These barriers to vulnerability exacerbated the women's loneliness, but faith gave them a real sense of feeling God's comfort and love. However, it was clear that faith was not enough. It was enough to tide them over their desperate loneliness or depression, but all three women needed more. They needed real vulnerability with human friends and real sexual intimacy. If their faith communities had provided a holding environment where they were free to embrace diverse human needs as important parts of the life of faith, perhaps they could have experienced God's love in more holistic ways. Rather than only emphasizing care for others, faith communities should also teach and model for youth appropriate ways of receiving help and being vulnerable.

4) Faith as assent and commitment to truth

Faith as assent and commitment to truth describes the dimension of faith in which human beings recognize divine revelation and commit their lives to truth. In the bible, people of faith encountered divine revelation and responded in faith. For example, when God called Abraham to leave his home and country, he obeyed and left everything. When God called Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, Moses went, albeit reluctantly. When an angel appeared to Mary with the news that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit, Mary assented to God's will. (She hardly had a choice in the matter, but she assented.) In these ways, biblical characters recognize divine revelation and respond in different ways as an expression of their faith.

Much like Mary, who assented to a major change in her life when she was told that she would conceive by the Spirit, the interview participants' lives were changed when their parents

received God's call to become missionaries. Each person assented to God's call, and this narrative became a foundational, meaning-making compass for their lives. Sophia explains:

Faith was the one strong foundation that never changed. Yeah. And because the way that it was explained to me [...] the reason why we moved so much is based on my father's faith. In being faithful to God's call. [...] Being a missionary. Moving here. Opportunities. Grabbing this [opportunity] and grabbing that [opportunity]. And it's like, with all these different moves and transitions, faith was the stability.

Faith provided stability for the participants so that they could make sense of their life transitions. It also gave them courage to make similarly bold vocational moves. Two themes emerged from the way they understood these call narratives—*adventure* and *loss*. A theme of adventure communicated hopeful expectations for what God would do through them, which would be worth the hardship or suffering along the way. The second theme, was about making sense of loss. Pastoral theologian Karen Scheib explains that “meaning making following loss” consists of trying to make meaning out of sudden disruptions or losses in life, in order to regain some sense of order, purpose, or understanding in the world³²² Because stories convey meaning, grieving persons may use stories to find meaning in experiences or situations that seem unsettling or disturbing. For example, when the TCK women experienced sudden disruptions in their worlds every time they moved, their family's call narratives became a way to find some order and coherence in the chaos and loss that followed.

These family narratives of faith later turned into their personal narratives of faith when they made their own vocational decisions and took bold risks. For Sophia, faith prompted her to go to seminary, and after seminary, to move to a new state that she knew nothing about. She simply felt God clearly leading her there and made the decision in faith.

Similarly, Vera made sense of her family's move to Russia as a faithful response to God's call. Knowing that their move was in obedience to God, Vera simply accepted it and adjusted, no matter how difficult it was. Watching her parents' commitment to God as they left everything

³²² Scheib, *Pastoral Care: Telling the Stories of Our lives*, 126.

behind in Korea to serve the Russian people was deeply formative for her. Witnessing her parents navigate the challenges of life with courage and trust in God helped her make sense of life's challenges and to pattern her own life according to faith:

The thing is, I see the purpose behind what happened in my life. Even with mom being away. I see how God has worked good in us and I see how God has turned something tragic into something worth to cherish. Well, my mom, she grew into this incredible woman of faith. I mean, she was always Christian, she was a pastor's wife, she was a missionary. Struggling with this illness has made her stronger. And I could definitely sense it. She always tells me that the illness has changed her life, but in a good way. I mean there was pain being separated. But in spite of everything, she talks a lot about how God worked everything together for the good.³²³

Her parents' example of a life lived in obedience to God and their trust in God's redemptive hand in the world helped her make sense of the suffering in her life as well as sustain her own decisions of faith during life's crossroads. For example, she took a leap of faith when she left her PhD in political science and prestigious career for seminary. She shared why she made that choice:

God, whatever that I do, I want it for your glory. For your work. For your kingdom, not mine. I've prayed this for a long time. For years, you know! I don't think that God would let those prayers just fall to the ground. Even if I don't see anything right now, I know that God heard them and someday, I will see His work in my life. Or through me in this world. God will do it even though I cannot see it. That is why I was able to leave my Ph.D., my career in Korea, I was able to leave it all. Because church is the primary thing.³²⁴

Her prayers reveal how central faith was and is in her orienting framework for living. Faith served as a significant meaning-making framework and compass for living out her commitment to the truth.

Eirene's story stretches the notion of faith as assent and commitment to the truth because her father's stroke started a major process of deconstruction, dissent, and departure in Eirene's faith. She no longer found security and stability in her faith and questioned if it was really worth committing to the truth as her father had. Her story deserves a closer look and will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter on disorientation in the life of faith. For now, I will say that Fowler's definition seems limited for not recognizing dissent and departure as part of valid responses of faith.

³²³ Vera, Interview by author, October 13, 2016.

³²⁴ Ibid.

5. *Faith and Marginality*

Fowler's definition of faith also did not include a connection between faith and marginality that the interview participants expressed. Korean American theologian Sang Hyun Lee makes this connection between faith and identity construction of marginalized peoples. From an Asian American perspective, Lee asserts that faith provides courage for minoritized/colonized people to stand boldly in the liminal³²⁵ spaces and engage the work of identity construction with dignity:

Faith is the act of trusting and embracing God's unconditional acceptance of us as God's children. Faith, therefore, is the unshakable foundation of one's sense of dignity and self-esteem. In faith, one affirms the meaningfulness and moral worth of oneself and one's existence. In and through faith, one stands firm even if the world considers her or him as one without value and worth.³²⁶

The TCK women's stories confirmed that when they could not fully claim citizenship or nationality in any one country, one thing they could fully claim was their identity as children of God or as citizens of heaven. Faith provided courage and dignity for the TCK participants when they struggled with ambiguous belonging. Eirene's family, for example, struggled with being "nation-less" as they no longer felt at home in Korea, Indonesia, or the U.S. It took their family seven years before they became permanent residents and several more years before they became citizens. During this long stretch of ambiguous national identity, her family took comfort in being citizens in the kingdom of God.

While the TCKs unanimously claimed that faith was a source of courage and stability in marginal spaces, the TCK participants currently did not seem to be actively trying to define their identities. Vera described the challenges of citizenship—longing for belonging in Russia yet institutionally and culturally being labeled as a foreigner. Being Korean citizen, she did not feel

³²⁵ The word *liminal* here refers to Victor Turner's concept of *liminality*, which means "threshold." Turner proposed that persons/communities in the peripheries, by their unique vantage points and positions, can usher in changes to existing identities and structures. See Victor Turner, *Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1969), 94.

³²⁶ Sang Hyun Lee, *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 117.

culturally at home in Korea, nor did she consider the U.S. her home. However, she currently felt content with her belonging in God and simply acknowledged that she did not quite belong anywhere else: “I would say I’m Korean raised in Russia, but I’m living in the United States studying. That’s it. I don’t quite belong with anyone specifically. That’s it.”³²⁷ She felt most secure in her identity in God and felt comfortable leaving the other parts of her national or cultural belonging undefined.

Sophia stated a similar contentment in leaving her identity undefined:

I don’t think there are words or labels that define my identity accurately, so I think I choose not to define myself in those terms—whether that’s Korean American or second-generation or 1.5, I don’t fit any of those. Even “Christian,” there’s a connotation that people have about what it means to be Christian...I’m not comfortable with that label either. So what do I identify myself as? I don’t have words for it, but I think I’m at a place where I’m very comfortable with that now. I no longer limit myself or conform myself to what people think. So I’m really free in that.³²⁸

Likewise, their faith identities were initially a source of strength and stability for all three interview participants. For Vera, it remained so, but for Eirene and Sophia they felt comfortable leaving their identities ambiguous. They did not seem to engage actively in the kind of “coherent” hybrid identity construction described by Sang Hyun Lee: “As what constitutes the unity of one’s sense of who one is, narrative gives his or her self-coherence and a sense of direction.”³²⁹ Rather than strive for coherence or clear sense of direction, the TCKs seemed to be at ease in the peripheries even though not everything felt settled or coherent. Their attitudes more closely resembled what Rita Nakashima Brock calls, “interstitial integrity.”³³⁰ Interstitial integrity refers to an openness to remaining connected with the multiple roots of one’s identity without collapsing into the pressures of essentializing endeavors or “pledging allegiance to a singular one.”³³¹ The TCKs expressed an

³²⁷ Vera, Interview by author, October 13, 2016.

³²⁸ Sophia, Interview by author, March 12, 2018.

³²⁹ Lee, *From a Liminal Place: An Asian American Theology*, 120.

³³⁰ Rita Nakashima Brock, "Cooking without Recipes: Interstitial Integrity," in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, ed. Brock Nakashima et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 140.

³³¹ Rita Nakashima Brock, "Interstitial Integrity: Reflections toward an Asian American Woman's Theology," in *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives*, ed. Roger A. Badham (1998), 191.

appreciation for all their experiences, but they resisted being boxed into labels or categories that could never capture their multiplicity.

Cultural and racial solidarity

All three women's identities and lives were profoundly shaped by their involvement in their faith communities. I already mentioned how Vera's involvement with church powerfully shaped her identity and vocation. But particularly for Eirene and Sophia, getting involved in their college Asian American Christian Fellowships gave them a chance to experience ethnic and racial solidarity, which became a significant turning point in their lives. In her book *God's New Whiz Kids? Korean American Evangelicals on Campus*, Kim studied the nationwide phenomenon of SGKA Evangelical students gathering in ethnic-specific campus ministries over a myriad of other campus ministries. She found three reasons undergirding SGKAs' preferences for joining SGKA campus ministries:

Given the structural opportunity to choose from a number of different campus ministries, SGKA Evangelicals will participate in a campus ministry where they (a) can associate with those who are *most* like themselves (those who are *most* likely to share similar familial and cultural experiences); (b) can have the highest likelihood of obtaining power/leadership positions and group dominance; and (c) are least likely to be marginalized as an ethnic or racial group.³³²

While Eirene and Sophia were not typical SGKAs, their faith and cultural identities fit most closely within Asian American Evangelical campus ministries where they could be known and connected. College provided a fresh start where everyone else was searching to establish new identities, friendships, and communities. Asian American Evangelical campus ministries provided spaces where they could develop their gifts, serve in positions of power/leadership, and grow in their faith identities. Ethnic/racial solidarity through their faith communities played a powerful role in their identity formation and vocation, as they all ended up going to seminary.

³³² Rebecca Y. Kim, *God's New Whiz Kids? Korean American Evangelicals on Campus* (New York: New York University, 2006), 14.

Summary

This chapter explored the significant role faith played in all three women's lives. Faith is a universal element of basic trust and hope that sets up one's experience of self and the world. Eirene's story showed that her church's teachings in her early childhood cast a shadow of mistrust in her life that was further complicated by her family's frequent moves. Despite this theological gloom in her life, faith provided a real sense of God's love, presence and consolation in her loneliness during high school when she had no friends. Her college evangelical community further relieved her loneliness with a new sense of community and an important holding space as she grew in her Christian identity. Yet her faith communities emphasized only courageous leadership and faithful commitment without addressing the whole spectrum of human needs or feelings, such as sexual intimacy, doubt, insecurities, or disappointment. As a result, Eirene struggled massively with feelings of inadequacy, envy, and sadness in a spiritual atmosphere that split off human experiences of doubt, uncertainty, or inferiority.

Faith provided a wholistic way of knowing and valuing for all three participants. In the depths of depression and suicidal thoughts, Sophia saw a "light at the end of the tunnel" and heard a voice encouraging her to persevere even though her present situation did not reflect those realities. She was able to orient herself to a transcendent realm through the eyes of her faith.

Faith added value to the women's identities in ways that affirmed and empowered them. For instance, the scriptures affirmed their identities as children of God, which provided security and stability to the TCK women whose identities were confusing in many ways. Scripture affirmed their physical appearance as created in God's image and conferred citizenship in the kingdom of God when they could not fully claim citizenship or nationality anywhere.

Faith offered the divine gift of God's grace and comfort in their loneliness when they had no friends and when they had such a hard time being vulnerable. They were much more familiar with helping others as pastors' kids and missionary kids, and their frequent experiences moving around made it difficult to open up easily with others. While God offered consolation to a certain point, their stories suggested that pastoral care practitioners and faith leaders need to be aware that loneliness and difficulty being vulnerable may be particularly salient issues when working with minoritized TCK women.

Call narratives provided powerful meaning-making templates by which to make sense of their life stories. These narratives of faith became a compass by which these TCKs aligned their life purposes and directions in response to divine revelation.

Fowler's categories of faith did not make the connection between faith and liminality, but Asian American theologians articulate that faith can embolden minoritized persons and communities to affirm their hybrid identities in liminal spaces. The TCKs showed an open connectedness to their diverse cultural experiences and preferred to leave their identities ambiguous rather than reduced to restricting labels.

Finally, Asian American or Korean American Christian communities in college were powerfully formative places where they could find friends, find some respite from the racial and ethnic marginalization in the larger society, and experiment with different leadership positions where they did not have to compete with more dominant groups.

With these themes in mind, pastoral care practitioners and faith leaders working with minoritized TCKs should recognize the powerful potential of faith communities and spiritual resources in their identity formation, relationships, healing, and life direction. Exploring affirming and empowering words in scripture will help minoritized TCKs strengthen more positive and secure images of self. In addition, faith leaders should seek to cultivate a culture where the negative aspects

of human experience, such as shame, doubt, anger, or insecurities are welcome and valued as important and vital parts of a life of faith. As faith narratives can be powerful meaning-making compasses for TCKs, it will be good to play with stories and explore how or if any parts of the stories connect with their own life stories. Deconstructing stories and modeling how to question, resist, and reconstruct different endings to stories will offer useful tools for children and youth in their own meaning-making journeys. Finally, young people should be given different roles and responsibilities to play, make mistakes, and discover their gifts in the affirming spaces of faith communities. In this next chapter, we will explore in detail the pastoral theological reflections that undergird these healing and empowering practices.

Chapter 7

Pastoral theological reflections on home, displacement, and identity

Only by shattering theological taboos and listening to a much wider range of stories and narratives can we find God in the strange and transgressive spaces.

-Kwok Pui Lan, “Changing Identities and Narrativities”

The previous chapter explained how faith played a central role in the TCK participants’ identity and belonging. Faith helped them make sense of their experiences of displacement, gave them a place to belong, affirmed their worth, and empowered them with a sense of purpose and direction in their lives. At the same time, faith could also silence their pain and feel disingenuous at certain moments in their lives. For example, the faith that once felt safe and secure came crumbling down for Eirene when her father suffered a massive, debilitating stroke. Eirene’s old theological beliefs rang hollow as she began to question God’s character. She recalled thinking, “하나님은 참 무서운 분이시구나...사랑이 많은 분은 아닌거 같다. 믿으면 다 되는게 아니고.” Roughly translated, “God can be really scary...God doesn’t seem to be very loving. Faith isn’t the answer for everything.”³³³ Her father had given his life to his faith, but in return, God seemed to have abandoned him. It also stung to be let down by certain family friends and fellow Christians during her family’s greatest time of need. With God’s absence looming large, Eirene’s previous dependence on God as *home* began to fall apart. Whereas faith once provided a grounding, stabilizing space for identity and belonging, it seemed unstable and shallow in her greatest time of need.

³³³ Eirene, Interview by author, February 24, 2018.

Pastoral theology: Aims, Functions, and Metaphors

One of the functions of pastoral theology is to address the kind of dissonance that Eirene encountered with her faith and lived reality. Pastoral theology seeks to better understand what is going on, explore God's presence or actions in relationship to the issue or context, and construct theological and practical responses to the issue or context.³³⁴ As Lartey states succinctly, "Pastoral theology [...] operates around and studies the central themes of *faith-inspired care* and *care-inspired faith*."³³⁵ *Faith-inspired care* refers to caring practices that are "implicitly or explicitly influenced" by the values, beliefs, and practices of faith traditions.³³⁶ *Care-inspired faith* points to the ways in which contexts and practices of care can inspire new knowledge or truths about the divine. In this sense, pastoral theology is a dialectical, *praxis-oriented* conversation—a mutually critical and transformative dialogue between theories that inform practice as well as practices that inform theories.³³⁷ The mutually critical and constructive pastoral theological conversations seek to hold the uncertainties, contradictions, and gaps in experience and theology, while exploring more contextually relevant theological insights and implications for pastoral care.

As contexts of care are diverse and changing, so too are the images and metaphors of care in the field of pastoral theology. Pastoral theologian Robert C. Dykstra attributes this rich diversity of metaphors in pastoral theology as a strength of our field because it reflects a commitment to address limitations and imagine new strategies of care in changing contemporary contexts.³³⁸ In one pastoral care context, for example, Dykstra discovered that the image of the *wounded healer* did not feel appropriate as a guiding image of care for a depressed woman who had previously attempted

³³⁴ James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, eds., *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000), 12.

³³⁵ Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 28.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ Woodward and Pattison, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 13.

³³⁸ Robert C. Dykstra, ed. *Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2005), 13.

suicide.³³⁹ Empathy and listening, which typically characterize the main strategies of care associated with the image of the wounded healer, seemed to dig a deeper pit of sadness. He therefore turned to other images that were not as familiar to him at the time, such as the *circus clown* or the *wise fool*, to incorporate strategies of reframing, paradox, and humor, which provided alternate methods of care.³⁴⁰ A rich array of metaphors in the field of pastoral theology, Dykstra argues, contributes to an ongoing self-reflection and creative construction of contextually appropriate theories and caring practices. Following this trajectory, this chapter proposes a pastoral theological metaphor of home as a holding environment for the identity formation of minoritized TCKs in an interstitial cultural milieu.

To arrive at a pastoral theology of home as a holding environment in this study, I use Lartey's intercultural pastoral theological method. The intercultural pastoral theological method privileges the wisdom and knowledge of previously marginalized cultural and religious groups as important data for pastoral theology and practices of care.³⁴¹ Toward this end, I invited minoritized Korean TCK women to be the authors of their own life stories. The participants and I co-analyzed the larger historical, socio-cultural, economic, and religious contexts that were embedded in their narrative environments. The previous chapters delved into the contextual layers, such as race, class, culture, and faith. This chapter engages in an in-depth theological analysis that addresses the prominent theological themes and questions salient in the TCKs' narratives of identity formation. Offering pastoral theological reflections and recommendations for practice, I seek to contribute to a postcolonial narrative pastoral theology with this text.

³³⁹ Ibid., 7.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 7-8.

³⁴¹ Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*, 44.

Toward a postcolonial narrative pastoral theology

A postcolonial narrative pastoral theology teases out the complex layers of historical, political, sociocultural, economic, and theological narratives that are intertwined into people's lives. Privileging the stories of minoritized persons serves the aim of postcolonial narrative pastoral theology to resist hegemonic, Eurocentric discourses and to recognize the knowledge and wisdom of previously silenced persons and communities. The key functions of postcolonial narrative pastoral theology in this study include healing, liberation, empowerment, and celebration.³⁴² Where narrative environments reveal situations of oppression and complicity and where exclusion and oppression cause suffering in relation to minoritized TCKs' identity and belonging, a postcolonial narrative pastoral theology seeks greater clarity of TCKs' situation, liberation from oppressive narratives, empowerment as authors of their own stories, and celebration of the wisdom and resilience shared in their stories of survival and flourishing.

Toward these aims, I explore the theological themes of home, displacement, and identity, which were most prominent in the TCKs participants' narratives. I approach these themes through interdisciplinary dialogue partners in biblical studies, psychology, pastoral theology, and postcolonial theory. Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann's reading of the Psalm's through Ricoeur's hermeneutical framework helps trace the psychological, geographical, and spiritual movement in TCKs' experiences of home, faith, and displacement. Toward a deeper understanding of home, I engage psychological discourses on home as a place where basic needs for safety, security, and physical and emotional nurture are cultivated for healthy human development. Since the white, male, middle-class norms that undergird these psychological theories call for more diverse perspectives from Third World perspectives, I dialogue with pastoral theologian Jan Holton's work with displaced people from the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the U.S.

³⁴² Lartey

Expanding on her understanding of leaning into God as home, I draw on Chicana feminist liberation theologian Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands toward constructing a pastoral theology of home as a generous holding environment for minoritized TCKs.

Biblical themes of home and displacement

The Christian scriptures were central to the participants' making sense of their displacement, home, and belonging. As such, the following section explores biblical themes around home, displacement, and faith. I distinguish between forced and voluntary displacement, explaining that TCKs' experiences fall under voluntary displacement. Asserting that voluntary displacement is not exempt from feelings of loss or grief, I highlight why TCK participants may suffer ambiguous loss through multiple levels of displacements.

The most ancient sacred texts in the Judeo-Christian tradition begin with stories of "home, displacement, and return."³⁴³ God creates a loving home for Adam and Eve, where they enjoy an intimate relationship with God and each other in the safety and abundance of the Garden of Eden. However, Adam and Eve make choices that result in their banishment from the Garden, marking the beginning of painful stories involving discord, violence, displacement, and longing for home. For instance, Cain kills his brother Abel and is forced to leave home to wander the earth.³⁴⁴ Jacob deceives his brother Esau and flees home to escape his brother's wrath.³⁴⁵ Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery, painfully ripping him away from his beloved family and land.³⁴⁶ The people of Israel are forced to leave home due to famine or war as refugees or as exiles. Jesus was also forced to flee his

³⁴³ Holton, *Longing for Home*, 32.

³⁴⁴ Genesis 4

³⁴⁵ Gen 28:5

³⁴⁶ Gen 37:28

hometown as a child in order to escape infanticide. These are a few examples of bible stories that touch on home and forced displacement.

It is important to distinguish between forced displacement and voluntary displacement. Forced displacement refers to people moving as the result of situations or powers out of their control that coerce them to leave. War, violence, famine, persecution, or natural disasters are often causes for forced displacement. The emotional and physical impact of being forced to leave would not be the same with someone choosing to leave for life transitional choices, such as one's occupation or marriage. When people choose to move out of their own accord under non-threatening circumstances, it is called voluntary displacement. Up to a certain point, voluntary displacement can be a natural part of the human life cycle. However, the reasons behind people's decisions to leave can be multi-layered and complicated, as personal decisions and outside coercion can overlap.³⁴⁷ Abraham and Moses, for instance, chose voluntary displacement when they responded to God's call. God told Abraham, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."³⁴⁸ Abraham freely made the decision to leave, but the text remains silent about whether everyone in his family were on board with the decision. Leaving a home, family, and friends to go to an unknown place must have elicited a variety of emotions from Abraham's family—grief, anger, sadness, or maybe hope and excitement. While Abraham's move can be categorized as voluntary displacement, it does not mean that it felt voluntary or that they were spared from feelings of grief or loss.

Moses is another person who left home in response to God's call, but it is ambiguous whether his decision to go was truly voluntary. Moses expresses his reluctance and fears to God several times, but God comes on so strongly that he obliges in the end. Moses braces himself to

³⁴⁷ Holton, *Longing for Home*, 10.

³⁴⁸ Genesis 12:1, NRSV

return to his birthplace and the home that he fled forty years prior in fear. His reluctance and fear reflect the complicated feelings involved in leaving or returning home and how thin the line can be between voluntary and forced displacement. I do not intend to say that the two have the same impact, but that sometimes, they may overlap. Voluntary displacement does not necessarily exempt people from grief, loss, anger, fear, or nostalgia. Whether forced, voluntary, or a mix of both, displacement or relocation almost always involve some measure of pain, disorientation, or loss.

The TCK participants' experiences of displacement can be categorized as voluntary by proxy, since their parents made the choice to move to different countries in response to God's call. But they had no say in the matter, nor did they fully understand how their lives would be impacted. As a result, they may suffer ambiguous loss. *Ambiguous loss* is a psychological term referring to loss that is vague, unclear, or uncertain.³⁴⁹ For example, my grandmother suffered ambiguous loss when she fled to South Korea during the Korean War and lost contact with her family in North Korea. I remember her watching South Korean TV shows of families looking for each other on television, grieving indeterminately as there was no way to know if they had survived the war. The uncertainty resulting in lack of closure characterizes ambiguous loss.

TCKs can suffer ambiguous loss when they move to different countries at a young age because they often do not know what they have lost until they find themselves in a new place. Forced displacement, such as war, conflict, or natural disasters leave something in their wake that makes the loss somewhat visual or palpable. But responding to God's call and going to another country with indefinite plans are not something that one can usually grieve about openly. These are sacrifices that people make for their faith, and they feel they must endure them since they were the ones who chose to leave. While this might make sense for missionary parents, their children are left

³⁴⁹ Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.

in the tough position to accept and endure disruptions in their lives that they never asked for or fully understood. For instance, all three participants had to grapple with challenges in their new environments every time they moved. With each move, they experienced ambiguous loss in language, relationships, history, land, culture, and identity even as they gained new ones. But they were not able to articulate or discern most of these invisible losses as children. Instead, they quickly moved on in order to survive and adapt to their new surroundings.

Movement in the Life of Faith: Orientation-Disorientation-Reorientation

One of the ways that the TCK participants survived was by finding home in their faith through times of dislocation. However, each participant's psychological and spiritual journey of finding home looked different. To describe these differences, the following section borrows the framework of *orientation-disorientation-reorientation* from Walter Brueggemann's hermeneutical reading of the Psalms. Brueggemann explores the diverse range of human responses to disorientation in the Psalms by drawing on Ricoeur's study of psychological and spiritual movements in the life of faith. Brueggemann's sequence of orientation-disorientation-reorientation provides a helpful framework for understanding TCKs' journeys of finding home in their faith. Brueggemann's intent was not to set a prescriptive pattern for interpreting people's journeys of faith, but the psychological and spiritual analysis of movement in the life of faith provided one way to describe the TCK participants' movement toward faith as home.

Brueggemann draws on Ricoeur, who described life as a movement between states of disorientation and reorientation. In other words, human beings shift between disorientation and reorientation in pursuit of "equilibrium" or harmony in their lives.³⁵⁰ In this process, Brueggemann

³⁵⁰ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 8.

highlights two primary movements for Psalm interpretation (1) not wanting to let go of a former world that is gone and (2) the ability to welcome a “new world being given.”³⁵¹ These themes pertain to TCKs and their journeys of leaving their old worlds and welcoming new worlds at multiple levels—geographical, psychological, or spiritual.

Using Ricoeur’s dialectic hermeneutic of suspicion and re-presentation, Brueggemann discerned that a theological movement in the Psalms can correlate with human experiences of *orientation-disorientation-reorientation*.³⁵² For instance, the psalms of orientation characterize an orderly and reliable world. All is well, and life seems fair. God is good to the righteous, while the wicked are punished. Psalm 1 is an example of a psalm of orientation, which talks about how the wicked are like chaff blown away in the wind, while the Lord watches over the righteous.³⁵³ Psalm 145 is another example of a psalm of orientation, where “the Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down” and “[satisfies] the desire of every living thing.”³⁵⁴ This worldview presents a harmonious balance and order in the world where the Lord watches over all creation and satisfies the desires of every living thing. The psalmist does not express dissonance between theology and lived reality where not all living things’ may agree that God satisfies their desires.

The psalms of disorientation do express this dissonance through the lament, protest, and resistance of people whose orientations are falling apart from situations of distress. Psalm 137:4, for example, records the anguished pleas of a homesick people in exile:

By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,

³⁵¹ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 8.

³⁵² In *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur converses with Karl Marx, Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche’s understandings of what he calls “the hermeneutics of suspicion.” Hermeneutics of suspicion questions all truth claims and the potential of such claims to manipulate, control, and mask the realities underneath appearances. Ricoeur integrated the hermeneutics of suspicion with the hermeneutic of re-presentation, positing that a hermeneutic of suspicion has the potential not only to deconstruct and demystify but also to inform and re-present new meanings.

³⁵³ Psalm 1:4-6.

³⁵⁴ Psalm 145:14,16.

when we remembered Zion.
 On the willows there we hung up our lyres.
 For there our captors required of us songs,
 and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
 “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”

The psalms of *disorientation* express a diverse range of responses to grief and loss, such as blame, denial, anger, or the desire to return to “better times.”³⁵⁵ Somewhere in the turgid waters of grief and loss, people strive to regain some kind of order or balance in their lives, to recover “a sense of holistic orientation, of being ‘at home,’ sometimes even “[denying] its loss when it is gone.”³⁵⁶

But when people are pushed to extreme duress, their former worldviews fall apart. Ricoeur drew on Freud’s concept of regression as a possible response in situations of extreme distress. Regression refers to people’s reenactment of earlier, primal stages of uninhibited desires and unresolved conflicts. In other words, people act on more primal urges rather than censure themselves or be censured by social conventions. Freud thought that regression was one way to discover the honest depths of people’s grief and loss. It was a way to question the reliability of old belief systems and to witness the collapse of previous orientations that no longer held up against reality. Drawing on Freud, Ricoeur put it this way: “Desire mystifies; the reality principle is desire demystified; the giving up of archaic objects is now expressed in the exercise of suspicion, in the movement of disillusion, in the death of idols.”³⁵⁷ People’s *desires* to maintain equilibrium during turbulent times may manifest in holding onto belief systems that seem to guarantee safety and order in their lives. However, situations of disorientation can shake up this equilibrium and dig up spiritual and emotional skeletons that must be reckoned with. The psalms of disorientation, according to Brueggemann, can provide language for this season in the life of faith and help dismantle old beliefs

³⁵⁵ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 11.

³⁵⁶ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 8.

³⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, (New Haven: Yale, 1970), 274-75.

through a hermeneutic of suspicion.³⁵⁸ When full scrutiny, suspicion, and lament have run their course, a deeper restoration becomes possible.

Here, restoration does not mean a return to better times or to the old orientation. Rather, restoration begins with acknowledging that things fell apart permanently, and there is no going back to the way things were. The people of Israel in exile, for instance, recognize that there will be no return to better times or their old homes. Things will never be the same. However, after lament has run its full course, new beginnings are possible.

The psalms of *reorientation* hold in tension this paradox. Memories of disorientation linger even as one becomes unexpectedly open to hope and new meanings. The praise in the psalms of reorientation do not reflect a complete naiveté about the discrepancies and injustices in the world; rather it is a praise that is possible because suspicion has run its full course and there is little left to reduce or demystify. In reorientation, one receives unexpected possibilities and hope of life, all the while remembering “the anguish of disorientation.”³⁵⁹

The way Brueggemann correlates movement in the psalms with the ebb and flow of human experience offers a language to frame the theological, psychological, and geographical themes of home and displacement in the life of minoritized TCKs. These themes will be discussed later in the participants’ stories.

Thus far, I have explored biblical stories on home and displacement as well as theological and psychological movement in the life of faith. The next section draws on developmental, pastoral theological, and postcolonial perspectives on home and displacement to see how these conversation partners enrich or limit TCKs’ embodied knowledge on home, displacement, and faith.

³⁵⁸ Brueggemann, *Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 22.

³⁵⁹ Brueggemann, *Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 25.

Defining home: Developmental, pastoral theological, postcolonial perspectives

The TCKs' life stories revealed that they found home in their faith, each in their unique ways. Since home means many things and may not be evident how it connects to TCKs' identity formation, this section contextualizes the notion of home in conversation with psychological, developmental, pastoral theological, and postcolonial perspectives.

In *Longing for Home*, pastoral theologian Jan Holton describes that human beings are “fragile creatures that require significant care and nurture to survive, grow, and thrive.”³⁶⁰ For many people, the home environment in which they experience this care and nurture plays a significant part in how they begin to think about themselves and live in the world.³⁶¹ Western psychoanalysts and developmental psychologists have devoted much attention to the kind of care and nurture that human beings need not only to survive but thrive. Attachment theorist John Bowlby observed that the attachment patterns established between infants and their primary caretakers impact their emotional and relational well-being later on in life.³⁶² British psychoanalyst and pediatrician D.W. Winnicott stated that primary caretakers need to provide a “holding environment” where babies sense relative security, helping them to venture out into the world with a developing sense of playful imagination.³⁶³ Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson proposed that the interplay between children and their environments as they negotiate certain developmental tasks has a profound impact on healthy development.

These theorists were focusing on the conditions that foster human growth, health, and development, which has important connections with envisioning the well-being of TCKs in their fluctuating experiences of home. They argued that human beings need relative safety, security,

³⁶⁰ Holton, *Longing for Home*, 15.

³⁶¹ Holton, *Longing for Home*, 15.

³⁶² Bowlby, *Attachment*. In *Attachment and Loss*: Vol. 1. New York, NY: Basic Books.

³⁶³ Winnicott, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World*.

physical and emotional nurture, as well as space for creative play in order to survive and thrive. Over the years, scholars have critiqued the limitations of their white, male, middle-class perspectives. For instance, Bowlby and Winnicott speculate about the intra-psychic life of infants by focusing on the mother-child dyad as if it were the most significant factor in children's development. They define the home environment in terms of Western norms of a small nuclear family, leaving out other influential primary caretakers, such as grandparents, fathers, extended family. They also tend to neglect the importance of wider social, political, and economic contexts that profoundly impact human beings.³⁶⁴ Erikson recognizes the importance of wider social contexts, yet his stage theory can reflect male, individualistic values of conflict and conquest. These limitations lead us to approach ideals of home with a hermeneutic of suspicion and to expand the conversation to include stories that speak to minoritized TCKs.

Then what exactly constitutes home? Is it relationships? Security? Safety? Definitions of home vary according to the sociocultural, economic, political, and spiritual contexts that shape our ideals.³⁶⁵ In the U.S., for example, home is strongly connected with Western individualistic ideals of owning private property and a house.³⁶⁶ The media often romanticizes the home as a place of safety and nurture for healthy children and as a bubble of protection from outside stress for adults.³⁶⁷ Images of huge, beautifully decorated homes instill the message that owning private property is a standard of success for middle class families.³⁶⁸ Hidden behind these ideals, however, lies histories of how certain groups came to amass vast pieces of property and wealth, such as the European

³⁶⁴ Cooper-White, "Human Development in Relational and Cultural Context," in *Human Development and Faith*, ed. Felicity Kelcourse (112).

³⁶⁵ Holton, *Longing for Home*, 27.

³⁶⁶ Holton, *Longing for Home*, 29.

³⁶⁷ Pamela Cooper-White, "Human Development in Relational and Cultural Context," in *Human Development and Faith: Life-Cycle Stages of Body, Mind, and Soul*, ed. Felicity Brock Kelcourse (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2015).

³⁶⁸ Jan M. Holton, *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality* (New Haven & London: Yale University, 2016), 29.

colonizers who displaced and killed hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples from their homes. Behind beautiful landscapes and houses remain racist policies and discriminatory practices against people of color that denied them rights or access to homes both in the past and present. The U.S. government, for instance, wrongfully displaced around 120,000 Japanese Americans from their homes to be imprisoned in internment camps on the unfounded suspicion that Japanese Americans might be colluding with Japan against the U.S. in WWII. Upon their release three years later, Japanese Americans returned to find their homes and businesses looted, destroyed, and occupied by others. These kinds of histories are hidden underneath the ideal of home as a private possession guaranteeing safety, nurture, and protection from the outside world. The protections, safety, and nurture pertain only to some, and ideals about home must take into account the demoralizing and painful experiences of displacement at multiple levels.

Pastoral theologian Jan Holton recognizes the importance of understanding home from the diverse perspectives of people who have experienced displacement. From the indigenous Batwa tribe, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Sudan and the DRC³⁶⁹ to the war veterans and homeless persons in the U.S., Holton tries to understand home and the impact of losing home through the lenses of those who have been forcefully displaced. Engaging sources from practical theology, sociology, and psychology, Holton presents the experiences of the displaced in their own voices and describes her own experiences and observations working with these persons and communities. She holds in tension the wisdom and resilience of those displaced, along with the pain and trauma that accompany experiences of displacement. Ultimately, she calls communities of faith that are committed to social justice to resist false narratives of fear against the stranger³⁷⁰ and to practice hospitality through actively learning what constitutes home for the Other.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ DRC stands for the Democratic Republic of Congo.

³⁷⁰ Holton, *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality*, 106.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

Holton's original contribution to pastoral theology from the diverse perspectives of displaced persons and communities articulates well their resilience and pain of displacement, weaving in theological themes of home, displacement, return, and hospitality. I appreciated her helpful conceptualization of home as meaning, belonging, safety, and relationships because it paints a concrete picture of what home can be for people who have experienced dislocation. At times, however, she seemed a bit inflexible in describing certain concepts. For example, she states, "Belonging includes a circle of people within a defined place."³⁷² I wondered why belonging *has to be* within a "defined place," since the experiences of my TCK participants showed that they could find belonging in multiple ways without always needing a defined place. Perhaps the lack of emphasis on *a defined place* reflects the privilege of the TCK participants in this study who never experienced homelessness, as opposed to the homeless persons in Holton's study. In any case, Holton also tends to portray an ideal picture of leaning into God as home. On the one hand, she acknowledges that attaining all the ideals of home that she outlined—*meaning, belonging, safety, or relationships*—can be burdensome and even painful reminders of the less-than-ideal realities of home for many doing their best to create home.³⁷³ On the other hand, she holds onto a somewhat ideal picture of God's grace coming through even where neglect, abuse, enmeshment, or violence compromise ideals of home:

When all else fails, God can still become the frame for belonging, meaning making, relationship building, and security. It is a challenge that highlights resilient possibilities in the face of harsh realities. Because God remains faithful to us in spite of our failures in home, nothing is impossible, though it may remain quite inexplicable.³⁷⁴

While these hopeful glimpses God's faithfulness in the midst of adversity may be true, I wished that she had fully explored the harsh realities when these theological narratives no longer hold meaning for displaced persons. In the case of the participants in my study, God indeed became "the frame for belonging, meaning making, relationship building, and security" at first when they felt displaced.

³⁷² Ibid., 87.

³⁷³ Ibid., 40.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 43.

For some, however, there eventually came a time when even God failed to provide that framework of home. The problem was not that “God remains faithful in spite of all our failures,” but that God *failed* to remain faithful in spite of their family’s faithfulness. Here, Holton might suggest that human beings do not always perceive God’s love and faithfulness in times of crisis, even if it is ever present.³⁷⁵ She states,

Although God’s faithfulness to us itself never changes, how we experience God’s breaking into everyday life is dynamic—ever involving and growing. In times of crisis, particularly when all that is familiar has been stripped away, we become ever more vigilant to the signs of God’s participation in our lives. In the immediacy of losing or fleeing home, displaced persons search for God to break through in the minute to minute and hour to hour survival.³⁷⁶

Not all displaced persons search for God in times of distress. The data in my study indicated that while the TCKs looked to God when all else had been stripped away, there came a point when trust disintegrated, and searching for God was no longer meaningful. To be more “confessional and honest”³⁷⁷ about the experiences of my TCK participants and to honor a hermeneutic of suspicion in their experiences of displacement, Holton’s pastoral theological reflections on home need to make more room for the ambiguous nature of God. In light of TCKs’ embodied knowledge of displacement and potential disintegration of trust when God fails to be home, I wish to maintain the narratives that acknowledge the sense of pain, betrayal, and uncertainty about God’s faithfulness as an important part of faith.

Queer Chicana feminist scholar Gloria E. Anzaldúa is one person who creates a definition of home with more flexibility and raw descriptions of how faith can be both life-promoting and destructive in one’s search for home. She writes from her experiences of displacement on multiple levels—*geographical* displacement when the U.S. initiated a war with Mexico to conquer and claim their land; the *social* displacement of her people living as though they were aliens in a white dominant

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 90.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Woodward and Pattison, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 13.

culture; the *cultural* and *spiritual* displacement where she cannot feel at home with patriarchal, sexist norms and practices within her own culture and religion. Contending for place, land, and identity amidst colonial, patriarchal, and sexist forces, Anzaldúa's understanding of home emerges from struggle and resistance. She writes about the struggles of living in a territory that the U.S. seized from Mexico, of feeling unsafe both in Mexican/Indian culture and white culture.³⁷⁸ Finding herself "caught between *los intersticios*, the space between the different worlds," Anzaldúa rejects oppressive social norms in Mexican/Indian cultures while fiercely resisting the displacement and colonization of her people by the U.S. Forging her own identity within the interstices between two worlds, she builds and carries around her own home: "I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry 'home' on my back." Since no space feels safe for her, she creates and claims her own space consisting of the memories, practices, protest, and resistance that reflect her own ideas of home.³⁷⁹ She writes,

So, don't give me your tenets and your laws. Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture.³⁸⁰

Anzaldúa carves out her own identity and home by interrogating oppressive cultures and religions. If her own culture fails to welcome her home, she will create a new culture that is made out of the values, meanings, and spiritual practices that are healing for her. She speaks with profound determination, agency, and resilience from her experiences of displacement.

Anzaldúa's embodied knowledge presents a more realistic and empowering concept of home from a postcolonial perspective. She understands displacement and creates an alternative vision of home that honors the struggles, the resistance, and the cultural and spiritual resources that can withstand the interrogation and outcry of displaced peoples. Her flexible and critical approach

³⁷⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 42.

³⁰⁰ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 43.

³⁸⁰ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 44.

makes room for more self-reflection, honesty, and agency in the process of reclaiming home for displaced peoples, albeit that home may be as small as the shell on a turtle's back.

Just as Anzaldúa's experiences of displacement led her to reimagine her identity and home in the interstices, her approach can demonstrate how the TCKs' experiences of home, displacement, and faith can help us reimagine ourselves, God, and home.

The following section listens to TCKs' embodied knowledge of their ambiguous losses and displacement in search of new aspects of identity, home, and God hidden in "strange and transgressive spaces."³⁸¹

Faith as home: Different paths

This section delves into the different ways in which their experiences of displacement and faith played a significant role in understanding who they were and how they created a sense of home. All three participants found home in their faith, but each of their paths were unique and different. I analyze their paths through the hermeneutic of orientation-disorientation-reorientation.

Sophia: Home in the silences

Sophia found home in her faith in two ways. One, faith provided an anchor for her and became the one stable thing in her life. As explored in the previous chapter, the scriptures about her being created in God's image and her belonging as a child of God helped ground her in her identity and belonging. The theological notion of wandering and home as heaven helped her make sense of all her family's moving around. Second, Sophia's faith fed her "rebellious nature."³⁸² Her father used

³⁸¹ Kwok Pui-Lan, "Changing Identities and Narrativities," *Complex Identities in a Shifting World: One God, Many Stories*, (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2015), 122.

³⁸² Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

to hate that part of her, asking, “Why do you always have to question or question authority or say what about this, what about that?”³⁸³ But Sophia felt encouraged by her faith to question and be curious. For instance, she noticed an odd silence while studying the person of Jesus in the scriptures. The text was silent about a whole chunk of Jesus’ life. Jesus’ life story starts out with his birth and him becoming a refugee, and then it skips to his twelve-year-old self in the temple before he appears abruptly as a thirty-year-old man who is so sure about his identity and call. She wondered when and how in his childhood and youth he realized that he was not only human but also divine:

[...] Jesus, his own identity was – he must have been confused too sometimes. Like okay, I’m fully man and I’m fully God, who am I? How do I act in this situation? And then having to keep that identity secret even. Like telling people, don’t tell people I am this. Like what does that mean for him? You know. And realizing that Jesus himself struggled with identity and not belonging fully somewhere was really powerful.³⁸⁴

Questioning the silences in the text about how Jesus handled his budding identity from childhood into young adulthood felt empowering for Sophia. She imagined how Jesus would come to embrace his identity as both divine and human. “Where are the twenty years in between?” she asked. Because her twenties were fraught with challenges of trying to figure out the multiple parts of her identity, she wondered,

Maybe I’m imposing my experience onto Christ, but how did Jesus know? He must have struggled, he *must have!* [laughs] Alright, like, so ‘Am I divine? I’m *clearly* human [laughs], but is this God’s calling? Did God have a direct channel to God that Jesus discovered at fifteen? I don’t know! How would Christ know that? But he figured it out by the time he was thirty, the next time we see him. ‘The next episode in the gospels’...So my imagination was wonder and curiosity about those missing years. [laughs]³⁸⁵

Like Anzaldúa, who claimed her own space in the interstices, Sophia questioned the gaps in scripture and created a space in the silences to build her own home in her faith.

Sophia’s journey of faith and search for home weave in and out with each other through a fluctuating series of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Theologically, her childhood and

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Sophia, Interview by author, March 12, 2018.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

youth begin in a place of orientation in which she treasured a mental image of her relationship with God as that of a little girl with pigtails, sitting on the Father's lap. The safety, comfort, and security that she lacked in her turbulent life circumstances and relationship with her father, Sophia tried to make up for it in her ideal image of God as Father. Then in seminary, the image changed to a scene, which Sophia described as "one of those scenes in cheesy romantic movies."³⁸⁶ She and Jesus are running toward each other in love and happiness like two lovers running toward each other in a beautiful field full of wild flowers. After seminary, she began to question the male images of God that were the only ones available to her up to that point. Again, the silences in her faith tradition about other available images began to pique her curiosity. She moved from a place of orientation to disorientation by questioning and exploring the painful places in her life that had remained buried or silent in the demands of survival. Did God really have her best interests at heart? Was God really good in her life? After surviving an abusive relationship, a few other disappointing relationships, and grieving the untimely death of her father, Sophia kept listening and making space for the painful places within her with greater vulnerability and compassion.

As she made home in the silenced places of disorientation both in her faith as well as the painful places of ambiguous loss, she became increasingly comfortable in the discomfort. In other words, she learned to appreciate and comfort the parts of herself that felt weak and wounded, rather than forcing herself to charge ahead and perform as usual. When she listened to the silences and grew more comfortable in disorientation, she began to feel more whole. Particularly, she realized that she no longer needed male figures to make her feel whole. When she was younger, the fantasy of having a boyfriend would promise comfort for any sadness, insecurities, or problems she was going through. She would think, "Oh, if I were married, I would be more secure and stable," or "I

³⁸⁶ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

would have someone who would ground me.”³⁸⁷ These desires had led her to search for home through relationships with men but ended up disappointed when those relationships did not meet her expectations of home, security, or belonging. It was only when she began to listen to the silenced parts of her and creating her own space of safety and self-compassion that she really began to feel home. She no longer felt the need to search for male figures to fill that need.

This shift translated into her relationship with God and her identity. Male images of God as father or lover seemed to imply that she was incomplete without someone else. She resisted that notion, saying, “If anything, God created me, and as His creation, I am whole.”³⁸⁸

As she explored the formerly silenced parts of herself as well as the silence around male images of God in her faith tradition, Sophia also found herself being pulled into strange and silent spaces of faith. For example, she no longer felt at home at the Korean-speaking worship service at her church. Yet even there, she encountered theological moments of re-orientation in unexpected ways. Usually, the lyrics of the hymns or songs in worship were distracting to her due to their patriarchal language or shallow theology. But once, she found herself being carried away by the music back to her college days when music had brought her closer to God and when she had taken voice lessons. The nostalgia and gratitude from those memories fed her spirit and warmed her heart unexpectedly. Even though her faith community no longer felt like home for her, she encountered home in marginal moments and unexpected places.

Another time, Sophia was on a mission trip with her church where local pastors from South America had gathered for an annual leadership conference. As people danced and sang around her in Spanish, Sophia had no idea what the words meant, but the music carried her into a different space of silent reflection. The experience felt ethereal and hard to put into words. Because it was so

³⁸⁷ Sophia, Interview by author, March 12, 2018.

³⁸⁸ Ibid. Ironically, her use of a male pronoun for God revealed old habits, but Sophia was clear about her intention to move away from male images of God.

hard to describe with words, she half-joked that the closest visual image of that space might be like the scene in the Japanese anime series, *Sailor Moon*, where iridescent colors glow and explode during the transformation of the characters. She said that it was a beautiful, abstract space with colors swirling, full of energy, life, beauty, and freedom. There was a quiet energy to the place. She was dancing with God, who appeared not as a human partner but as an abstract presence teeming with colors, joy, life, and freedom. Words could not adequately describe that experience, but this image of dance, delight, and partnership came to replace her previous male images of God.

These movements in Sophia's faith contain the characteristics of Anzaldúa's reclaiming home *en los intersticios*. Like Anzaldúa, who said, "Don't give me your lukewarm gods," Sophia rejects the patriarchal images of God with which she once associated her salvation and healing. She no longer associated men or a male god with her healing or identity but rather learned to "staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion [her] own gods out of [her] entrails."³⁸⁹ In other words, Sophia learned to recognize and care for her own wounds in ways that reflected her growing "feminist architecture," deepening self-knowledge, and unique sense of the divine.³⁹⁰ Questioning the silences in her faith was Sophia's way of carving and chiseling her own her own identity, faith, and home.³⁹¹ The way that she cherished the irrational images, visions, and sense of the sacred also echoes Anzaldúa's attention to her receptiveness and sensitivity to the spirit world.

Sophia's journey of reclaiming home in her faith also parallels Ricoeur's concept of *reorientation*, which are new moments, meanings, and re-presentations of reality that often come unexpectedly, almost like a gift.³⁹² Brueggemann's description of reorientation resembles Sophia's spiritual experiences:

³⁸⁹ Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 44.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Brueggemann, *Psalms*, 9.

In our resistance, we do not expect to be surprised. The new situation is not an achievement or a working out of the dislocation, but a newness that comes to us. Equally, it is not a "passage," as though it were automatic or inevitable. It comes as a miracle wrought from outside the situation. And it is only when that newness meets the human person or community convincingly that an abandonment of old orientation may be fully affirmed.³⁹³

Likewise, Sophia was not particularly looking for any of new images or experiences, but as she felt more and more comfortable in places of disorientation, these moments of grace found her unexpectedly in strange, silent, and creative spaces. She found glimpses of home in the interstices by listening to the silences in scripture, questioning old images of God, and being surprised by the divine in silent and strange spaces of faith.

Eirene: Home as ...

Eirene's search for her identity, belonging, and home changed constantly in relation to her experiences of geographical, emotional, and spiritual displacement. As described in detail in previous chapters, Eirene's story begins with disorientation as the result of living apart from her parents. As a little child, home meant being with her nuclear family. Then when she finally got to live with her nuclear family, their family moved four times during their four years in Indonesia. Never staying in one place long enough to put down her roots or develop a sense of home or belonging, she longed for the ideal of home as a house, a fixed place of their own. When her family moved again, this time to the U.S., she realized that living in a place of their own does not create home when racism and classism are woven into the socio-political and economic fabric of the U.S. The sense of being outsiders in the U.S. left her reevaluating her definition of home as a house. This was when she began to rely on a theology of orientation, meaning that she looked to God to comfort her in her loneliness and imagined home as heaven. As her family waited for years in limbo for legal residency

³⁹³ Brueggemann, *Psalm*, 9.

and citizenship, they looked to heaven for their home and identity, where they belonged as citizens in the kingdom of God.

But when she tasted the beginnings of genuine belonging and friendship with her faith community in college, Eirene felt more agency about home as her own making. It seemed possible to find belonging through relationships and community. At the same time, Eirene struggled with a damaged sense of self and insecurities. A budding sense of agency and an ongoing struggle with her insecurities led her to picture home as “wherever God is.” By *home is wherever God is*, she meant that every space had the potential to become home because God was there inviting her to join:

And God was already there and working and beckoning me to join, and you don't need to fear. God is telling me that I'm already back in the U.S. You're just coming where I am and I'm already working there. I'm already there. When I'm working at a psychiatric facility or at a hospital, God is already in that hospital patient's room or in that patient's life. I'm just going there and finding God working there and seeing that and witnessing it. That's what I thought about home.³⁹⁴

Eirene’s theological reflection reveals a space created through divine invitation and human response. Wherever God calls and humans respond, that place of partnership becomes home. God’s invitation and human response makes that particular encounter or place one’s home, not necessarily one’s *feelings* of comfort, belonging, people, things, or places. In this sense, home is more like a journey, where God beckons and creates home every step of the way. Knowing that God is present and inviting Eirene helped her to step into new situations without undue fear or devastating feelings of loss.

This particular theology of home features God as an active and caring host. For TCKs like Eirene, who had to brave highly disruptive international transitions multiple times throughout their childhood and young adulthood, this can be a comforting metaphor. While almost everyone at some point has to adjust to new places on their own, these TCKs had to be brave beyond their age repeatedly. They had to scan their environment quickly and perform with maturity beyond their age

³⁹⁴ Eirene, Interview by author, October 26, 2016.

to try to belong and be successful. For these reasons, it is understandable that Eirene imagined God as an engaged and caring host inviting her into strange, new places.

This theological metaphor began to unravel, however, when her father suffered a massive stroke. I started out this chapter with Eirene's story of theological dissonance, when her previous ideas of God as home no longer made sense. Faith no longer had meaningful answers in her time of crisis, and God's character seemed questionable to her at best. During this period, she felt a growing sense of displacement in her faith and a greater sense of home in the spaces created between the people who showed up for her father. Some of them were close friends, others were strangers.

Experiencing their physical presence and care, Eirene redefined home as

[...] a community of companions in time of need, and it's that home that exists not in a certain person but in the empty space that is made between and among persons when the community congregates, and especially when the community forms around the weak and the sick, as in my dad. So home is that – it's not perfect, but it's the relationship and the space that forms in that empty space when people congregate. [...] it is people with the kind of intention, a certain kind of intention to be together in support and care, and that tends to happen when one person in the community is weak or sick and people gather around, and that gives the community some kind of solidarity.³⁹⁵

In other words, she no longer subscribed to ideals of a perfect home but rather found it in the empty spaces created in between the bodies of people gathered in solidarity with the vulnerable.

Eventually, Eirene left home, and she left it in many ways. She left Indonesia, her parents' mission field, her church, and pastoral ministry. She became comfortable in *not* being oriented theologically and made a home in disorientation. When I first interviewed Eirene, she was in a phase of disorientation and feeling comfortable there.

When I followed up over a year later, she was making home in disorientation, with occasional glimpses of reorientation. Eirene recently married a Korean pastor and became a pastor's wife by default. Even if she no longer subscribed to Korean conservative evangelical church cultures and beliefs, she was ritually involved in the weekly rhythm of the church. In this uncomfortable

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

space of disorientation where she no longer felt home, she made a choice to engage in the space with a hermeneutic of suspicion. Whereas Sophia had experienced reorienting moments in worship, Eirene found herself in further disorientation. For example, once when her church was singing old hymns, she grieved that she could never sing those songs again with that kind of passion and fervor. She grieved for the home she felt in her faith at one time, which would never return.

At the same time, she engaged in reorienting rituals and practices of faith on her own that expressed her ideas of home and identity. She described her faith as ritualistic and mundane, not so much about feelings or tears. She found inspiration in poetry and recited prayers from a book featuring prayers from diverse faith traditions and religions. Her Catholic prayer beads were a visual and tactile reminder of the rituals and habits of prayer. It was also noteworthy that the love that she shared with her husband softened and opened her heart again toward transcendence.

Eirene's relationship with her husband provided a type of holding environment where she could explore who she was. With him, she felt safe and grounded. Within this safety, she set an intention to ask herself every day, "What must I do? How should I set my schedule? Don't get swept up in the other person's rhythm. If I really prioritize myself, what would this day look like?"³⁹⁶ Eirene was practicing listening to herself, her priorities and desires. Her life as a TCK had made her very skilled at taking cues from her environment and adapting to the demands around her, but she needed more practice listening to herself and gaining clarity about her own needs and goals. Part of this focus on herself seemed to reflect a theological shift from helpless dependence on God to human agency. This was a move that began when she no longer associated God with home but rather the space created in between people gathered in solidarity for the vulnerable. The Christian tradition in which she grew up emphasized human helplessness more than agency, which was doubly unhelpful to her since she was struggling to find who she was in the midst of confusing cultural

³⁹⁶ Eirene, Interview by author, February 2, 2018.

narratives. Reacting against that helplessness, now she focused more on how Jesus lived an inspiring life as a *human* being. “Don’t we all have that divinity that was in Jesus?” she asked. Half-jokingly, she said that her Christology was more akin to the yoga mantra, “The divine in me recognizes the divine in you.” She was very aware of her foibles and limitations, but she also found home in the sacredness of the mundane and the broken. She was learning to love and flourish from that sacredness within. In this way, Eirene’s search for home had gone from parents, house, heaven, God as host, to community, and now to her relationship with her husband and the divine within herself.

Vera – Relationship with God

In the ups and downs of her life, Vera found home in her relationship with God. She found stability in the conviction that God’s purposes always prevail and God’s promises never fail:

The thing is, I see the purpose behind what happened in my life. Even with mom being away. I see how God has worked good in us and I see how God has turned something tragic into something worth to cherish. Well, my mom, she grew into this incredible woman of faith. I mean, she was always Christian, she was a pastor’s wife, she was a missionary. Struggling with this illness has made her stronger. And I could definitely sense it. She always tells me that the illness has changed her life, but in a good way. I mean there was pain being separated. But even so God worked all things together for the good [...] I really believe that.³⁹⁷

Her words reflected a theology of *orientation*, which helped her make sense of the painful events in her life and believe that God could redeem all things for God’s purpose. Quoting Romans 8:28, “God makes all things work together for the good of those who love God,” Vera shared that she had seen evidence of this truth over and over again in her life. For example, even though there was the pain of separation when her mother became sick, she watched her become stronger in her faith and witnessed the fruit of her parents’ mission work despite all the difficulties they faced. When her family first came to Russia, her parents barely spoke Russian and simply had to rely on God to make

³⁹⁷ Vera, Interview by author, October 13, 2016.

it through. Yet her parents planted four churches and a seminary within the first few years of their ministry, which she thought was impossible without God's faithfulness:

I'm not saying that my parents did something great but just that it's the work of God that God is faithful to those who trust in Him. That's what I learned from observing my parents' lives. Yeah. That really motivates me in life. The fact that I know that is like a treasure to me.³⁹⁸

Witnessing God's faithfulness to her parents' dedication increased her trust that God would also do the same in her life:

I prayed for a long time that whatever I do, I want it for your [God's] glory. For your work. For your kingdom, not mine. I've prayed this prayer for a long time. Years, you know! I don't think my prayers will fall to the ground. Even if I don't see it with my own eyes, God heard my prayers, and one day I will see His work in my life. Or through me in this world.³⁹⁹

Vera's experiences of displacement and faith had deepened a relationship of trust and a life centered around God's purposes.

Her theology seemed to suppress her humanity at times. Because she moved around so much in her life and established a strong sense of security in her relationship with God, she held other earthly things loosely, like human relationships. For example, she said:

I don't obsess over people. Maybe it is a bad thing. I don't know. [laughs] Human relationships matter to me, and they are important. I can't live without them. But even if I don't have those relationships, I'm okay. Human relationships come and go, and I can fill new relationships wherever I go. What's more important is the relationship with God. I see the value, but I try not to depend too much on people. But it's ironic because I still crave for love.⁴⁰⁰

Her theology suggested an implicit hierarchy between loving God and loving human beings. She prioritized her relationship with God over relationship with people, since people come and go. For this reason, she tried not to depend too much on people, yet she admitted that she still craved for love. Her theology and persistent craving for love seemed to be slightly at odds with each other.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Vera, Interview by author, October 13, 2016.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

Navigating Interpretive Tensions and Conflicts

Here I want to make a note of my own countertransference on several levels, which can provide valuable data about my issues as I present her story as well as important information about Vera. Her story reminded me of similar themes in my own past--a dominant narrative of God's faithfulness, theology of orientation, and lingering loneliness. While interviewing her, I was reminded of myself about ten years ago. For example, I remember writing my autobiography for a pastoral care class in seminary, in which I wrote about the hardships as well as the miracles in my life with a strong theme of God's faithfulness and redemption holding my story together. Every hardship, every sad memory pointed to some purpose and redemption at work. My professor's feedback included comments that acknowledged how much I had endured and overcome in life, as well as a gentle remark about my tendency to look at everything through "rose-colored glasses." I felt like someone had poked a tiny little hole in my balloon—my tight helium balloon that kept me afloat with joy and pride all these years in spite of everything. Instead of marveling at the height of my balloon, my professor suggested that it might need to come down a little to be realistic. I felt slightly offended that he did not understand the depth of my relationship with God that enabled me to see all the events in my life with resilient faith and hope. Yes, there were hardships, but I felt that I was in touch with the sadness of my past. There were too many miracles and proof of God's hand in my life to dwell on past hardships. I had survived those hardships, but God had turned everything for the good. I did not appreciate someone else telling me how I should tell my life story or how I should feel about my past.

Even though I felt more puzzled by my professor's comment then, I would come to know the profound depths of my pain in the years to come. And I learned to let sad and terrible things to be sad and terrible rather than feel the impulse to make things fit into a redemptive theology. Thus, when Vera tended to wrap things up beautifully in the telling of her story, I was reminded of my

own “rose-colored glasses” in the past. I also noticed her choice to focus on positives than the negatives and her emphasis on God’s faithfulness holding her life together. She also kept revisiting previous comments in her interview to make sure that they were more balanced rather than let her initial, raw, unfiltered emotions be. For example, when she looked at the manuscript of some of the things she said, she wondered why she had even made such a big deal out of certain things and minimized her emotional reactions. This signaled to me that this might be perhaps how she deals with emotions. I wondered if she censored her emotions to allow only thoughts and emotions that were more balanced and “appropriate.” In fact, she expressed that it was difficult to get herself to read some of her interview data for a couple reasons. She was hesitant to revisit emotions that she had buried in the past through the use of her reason: “I tend to suppress my emotions through reason.” This censoring tendency reflected Enlightenment ideals of elevating reason over unruly, untrustworthy emotions. It also suggested possible “resistance,” which was Freud’s psychoanalytic term for describing unconscious defenses against the resurfacing of painful materials from childhood trauma.⁴⁰¹ Defense mechanisms include denial, repression, projection, or dissociation, to name a few. While defenses serve to protect, they can also be a source of frustration and pain when a person has outgrown their usefulness and when the defenses hinder greater self-awareness. Freud was first to detect that a major source of people’s pain came from their unconscious repetitive enactment of earlier wounding experiences. Working through old survival mechanisms and discerning their usefulness for safeguarding one’s sense of wholeness and “integrity” constitutes the central work of psychoanalytic treatment.⁴⁰²

I noted Vera’s tendency to repress or minimize unpleasant emotions and how her theology led her to prioritize God and hold human relationships loosely. About a decade ago, I had also

⁴⁰¹ Sigmund Freud, *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through*, trans. James Strachey, *Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud* (1914), 147.

⁴⁰² Cooper-White, *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective*, 226.

thought that I should seek satisfaction for my loneliness from God and had minimized my human needs because at the time I thought they were basal and not spiritual. My theology translated into the way I related with my friends—I spent a lot more time with God than with friends and held back from depending on human relationships because I thought it was the right thing to do. I was puzzled and plagued by a deep and stubborn loneliness. When my theology changed gradually after many years of therapy and spiritual direction, I came to value human experiences and needs as important ways of loving God, myself, and my neighbor. Since my theology, views on human relationships and needs conflicted with Vera’s perspectives, I needed to pay attention to my countertransference to make sure I presented her story with a spirit of curiosity and hospitality.

This is why I did not feel comfortable simply imposing Freudian theories of defenses and resistance to interpret Vera’s story. My hesitation came from my own experiences of people in positions of power imposing their interpretations in culturally-insensitive, invalidating ways. For instance, I remember sharing in CPE a personal story about living apart from my parents while they were doing mission work. My CPE supervisor said, “I don’t know about you, but that sounds to me like neglect.” I was enraged by his comment because he had insulted my parents without knowing their love for me or the incredible sacrifices they made for God. I acknowledge that my strong reaction to his comment can provide useful information about my own defense mechanisms, but from a postcolonial perspective, I felt that his comment was violent for saying something so easily without having lived my life or creating room for my interpretation. No matter how true his observations might have been in a North American culture, I also valued my Korean culture’s commitment to honor our parents’ sacrifices and their intentions to love God and love their children in the best way that they knew how. Without such intercultural sensitivity and openness, we can immediately reduce the other according to our own theories and assumptions, foreclosing other

people's stories before they have had a chance to speak for themselves. Pastoral theologian Melinda McGarrah-Sharp articulates well such power dynamics that can distort and dehumanize others:

Breaches within intercultural relationships disrupt relational bonds, intercultural understanding, personal and communal identities, and recognition of oneself and others. Histories of colonialism institute dehumanizing practices of gazing that linger on in representations that block mutual recognition. Inevitable failures can fragment such representations when glimpses of a deeper recognition break through to the horizon of possibility. The misunderstanding stories in which I am a participant move toward more mutual understanding with self-awareness, patience, commitment, and the discipline of sustained partnership cognizant of inherent tensions.⁴⁰³

Moving toward more “mutual understanding with self-awareness, patience, commitment, and the discipline of sustained partnership cognizant of inherent tensions” involves an intention to honor the wisdom in another person's story while recognizing the tensions within myself as they arise. As a researcher, I have my theories, but they are only conversation partners. Looking back on that conversation with my CPE supervisor, I thought about how different I would have felt if he, as a white man in a position of power, had invited me into a conversation instead of making a judgment--“I wonder how God felt when you lived apart from your parents.” Or “Your parents were very faithful and did their best to honor God with their lives. They certainly lived out their faith in the best way they knew how, and there's no question about that. You were also faithful in your own way in understanding your parents! I wonder if you've ever thought about how God felt when you were sick all by yourself.” This approach reflects a much more mutual approach of a “pastoral story companion”⁴⁰⁴ who walks alongside with curiosity, compassion, and respect rather than imposing a jarring statement of judgment.

Since this interview was not a pastoral counseling situation, I only noted my countertransference and observations about how Vera found home in her relationship with God.

⁴⁰³ Melinda A. McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories: Toward a Postcolonial Pastoral Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 153.

⁴⁰⁴ *Pastoral story companion* is a term coined by Karen Scheib to describe persons engaging in pastoral care through carefully attending to another person's story while listening to God's presence in their narratives and fostering stories that strengthen and empower. See Scheib, *Pastoral Care: Telling the Stories of Our Lives*, 14.

Her story did not dwell much on themes of disorientation, and she tended to minimize her own pain, sickness, or loneliness in comparison to the good things she gained from her experiences as a TCK. She prioritized her relationship with God over her attachment to other human beings and expressed a lingering loneliness.

A Pastoral Theology of Home: Generous Holding Environment for Minoritized TCKs

Each participant had unique truths to tell about their search for identity and belonging, which were intricately tied to their experiences of geographical, emotional, and spiritual displacement. Faith played a central role in their search for home, but how each person chose to construct their home in connection to faith were different. Their stories reflected incredible wisdom and resilience as well as sensitive areas that called for extra care and healing.

The participants' complicated search for identity and belonging began with repeated experiences of displacement when God called their parents as missionaries. Biblical narratives of people leaving home to follow God's call helped them make sense of their own internationally mobile lives. Abraham leaving home to follow God's call or Jesus living a life of ministry without a home (Matthew 8:20) helped them accept and embrace new situations as part of God's will and plan. While these religious narratives justified the life they lived, the dominant narrative of God's call and faithfulness silenced other narratives of ambiguous loss that were significant to their flourishing. For example, all three women had to be so strong and independent in order to survive that they had not known how to tend to their *longing for relationship*. Vera described a continual "craving for love," which she sought to fulfill in her relationship with God. Yet, she still felt an unresolved craving for love. Sophia tried to fulfill her desire through a significant other but ended up almost losing herself in an abusive relationship that made no room for her desires or needs. Eirene struggled with deep

loneliness and increasingly turned away from God as her home toward home in human solidarity and intimacy.

All three participants' stories of displacement, home, and faith pointed to the importance of a relational holding environment, where their needs, desires, and ambiguous losses could be held and recognized as valid and important. Theological narratives of God's call had helped motivate them for the highly mobile life that they lived, but it had not made adequate space for their needs, losses, and griefs to be acknowledged. For instance, after Sophia got out of an abusive relationship and multiple other unsatisfactory relationships with men, she worked on creating a space for herself and carefully attending to her own needs and vulnerabilities as well as celebrating her strengths and gifts. As she listened to the silenced parts of herself and worked through unresolved griefs and losses, Sophia came to a place where she felt more soft and open to exploring relationships, not to fulfill a missing part of her or to bend over backwards filling others' needs, but rather to meet another on equal footing. This kind of emotional and spiritual space that she created for herself was a type of holding environment where she felt free to explore who she was and choose how she wanted to relate with others in the world.

Eirene was a little different in that she knew how much she needed an intimate relationship, someone that she could rely on. Her husband provided that stable, holding environment, which she needed after a lifetime of trying to be strong for herself in strange new places and after her father's illness. The love between her and her husband gave her the space, freedom, and courage to explore her own needs and to be intentional about setting her own goals. Although she could never go back to her faith as before, she was surprised that the love that she and her husband shared softened her heart toward the divine and the transcendent. She now sought the divine in the ordinary and the mundane rituals and rhythms of human life, feeling empowered by a sense of the divine in herself and others.

Vera found her holding environment in her relationship with God. She tried not to depend too much on human beings but still felt an unresolved craving for love. Recognizing my countertransference and conflicts between her perspectives and mine, I shared my observations about possible resistance and her tendency to not tolerate ambiguity. However, I think that a compassionate and hospitable reading of her story also honors and recognizes the life that she lived and the wisdom that emerges from her experiences. The role of caring pastoral story companions in postcolonial contexts should be to co-create holding environments for TCKs like Vera and to take care not to invalidate her sense of integrity with theories or theologies that conflict with her truths. Co-creating a holding environment with TCKs like Vera would involve recognizing and rejoicing with God's faithfulness in her life as well as gently exploring questions, such as, "I wonder if you ever thought about how God felt about you growing up apart from your mother." "I'm curious to hear more about your craving for love. What do you think that is about?" or "You said that you tend to suppress your emotions with reason. That sounds like something important for you in the way you live your life. I'm curious to hear what that is like for you to do that." Such questions value and respect the wisdom and resilience in people and invite them to speak their truths without labeling them as resistant or pathological.

Summary

In this chapter, I proposed a postcolonial narrative pastoral theology of home as a generous holding environment for minoritized TCKs. Drawing on Lartey's intercultural pastoral theological method, this study privileged the narrative identities of three Korean TCK women. In conversation with biblical, psychological, pastoral theological, and postcolonial perspectives, I explored theological themes of home, displacement, and faith, which featured most strongly in the participants' narratives. For instance, biblical call narratives helped the TCKs make sense of their

identity, belonging, and experiences of displacement, but they did not always make adequate room for the TCKs' pain or ambiguous loss. Despite the pain and loss, each participant demonstrated a resourceful and resilient search for identity and belonging. Woven throughout their search were stories of displacement and movement at several levels—geographical, psychological, and spiritual. Walter Brueggemann's biblical hermeneutic of orientation-disorientation-reorientation provided a helpful framework for describing the different levels of movements and displacement in the TCKs' lives. Since each participant's story featured themes of faith and finding home, I engaged psychological, pastoral theological, and postcolonial perspectives toward exploring definitions of home that honor the embodied knowledge and wisdom of minoritized TCKs. The TCKs' narratives of faith and longing for home showed that a relational holding environment was crucial for understanding who they were and how they wanted to live in the world. However, the relational holding environment looked different for each person, so I intentionally let their polyphonic voices be heard with their theological contradictions and tensions intact.

Sophia found home in the silences—silences in scripture about Jesus' developmental years, silence around divine images that are not male, the silenced parts within herself in her struggle to survive, and silent and strange moments of divine encounter.

Eirene found home along the way as her theology and life circumstances changed. From home as parents, house, and heaven, to home as her making and wherever God is, Eirene demonstrated a resourcefulness and theological agency in her search for home, identity, and belonging. The tragic event of her father's illness brought about a spiritual and psychological displacement that no longer made her feel home in the God that she once thought she knew. With this disorientation, she shifted her gaze from God as home to recognizing the sacred in humanity—for instance, in spaces of solidarity when people show up for the vulnerable, in her relationship with her husband, and in herself.

Both Sophia and Eirene came to emphasize the divine in human beings. Though human beings are fragile and limited, we still have the divine in us. After a lifetime of struggling with insecurities and low self-esteem, exacerbated by a theology of human helplessness and dependence on a male God, Sophia and Eirene's theologies had shifted to a low Christology. Jesus Christ was fully human, and he lived an inspiring life, so why wouldn't the same divinity be present in our humanity? This theological direction felt much more empowering for them as they were well-acquainted with societal messages and theological messages that undermined their power and agency.

While Sophia and Eirene found home in transgressive spaces of disorientation in their faith, Vera found home in a theology of orientation, where God was faithful, present, and active in her life. She found the greatest security and belonging in her relationship with God and held human relationships loosely as they would come and go. Since she still felt a lingering loneliness, I thought that a caring practice for pastoral story companions would be to co-create a holding environment for Vera by inviting her into conversations that would honor her story as well as explore more in depth the gap between her theology and lived experience.

My purpose in maintaining the dissonant integrity of each participant's search for identity, home, and belonging was to show the diversity in how TCKs can make sense of their identities. Rather than settle on some ideal definition of home that is available to a privileged few, I wanted to present the stories of minoritized TCKs and how each person defined home for themselves differently. A relational holding environment that creates space for their ambiguous losses and grief from displacement seemed to be a catalyst for greater self-awareness, budding self-agency, and finding the divine in "strange and transgressive spaces."⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁵ Pui-lan Kwok, "Changing Identities and Narrativities: Postcolonial Theologies," ed. Pamela Couture et al., *International Practical Theology* (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2015), 122.

Chapter 8

Bread for the Journey

Once during a conversation with someone I met for the first time, we realized quickly during our conversation that we were both TCKs and that we had actually lived very close to each other in the Philippines. We were instantly delighted to share this unique connection. Then he gave me this empathic look and said, “You made it! I’m always so glad to see another person who survived [a TCK upbringing].” We both broke out in laughter, but we both knew that we were not joking about surviving.

I do not want to give the impression that a Third Culture experience is full of suffering. In fact, it can be a privilege to grow up transnationally. The interview participants shared that they appreciated the privilege of learning other cultures intimately, speaking multiple languages, and being able to adapt quickly almost anywhere new. Sophia loved who she had become and felt very proud of how her upbringing had made her so strong and open to trying new: “Not much can destroy me or shake me to the point of breaking down. I’ve become very adventurous, excited about new things.”⁴⁰⁶ In many ways, a Third Culture experience can be rich and full of adventure.

But my central concern in conducting this study was to make sure that minoritized TCKs’ experiences are heard and to show examples of how emerging TCKs might begin to make sense of their identities in ways that are healing and empowering. I wanted to share tools that will help them make more sense of their convoluted journeys and multiple narrative environments. More than anything, I wanted their stories of survival, resilience, and wisdom to be heard in accessible ways to emerging TCKs. I hoped that this work might be bread for the journey if ever they feel that the path

⁴⁰⁶ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

is too confusing or overwhelming. Toward this end, my research told the narrative identities of three Korean young adult women TCKs in their own voices. The interviewees and I were in constant conversation through the writing process, which led to mutually created meanings that surprised us with insightful, healing, and liberating moments as well as frustrating moments when our views collided. I tried to uphold our different perspectives as examples of deepening intercultural understanding in moments of conflict and tension.

Summary of Findings

The following themes emerged from their stories. The greatest stressors for these minoritized TCKs were *performance pressure and loneliness and non-belonging*, and faith was the most stabilizing and affirming factor—at least during their teenage years up to their twenties.

The themes of performance pressure, loneliness, and non-belonging were analyzed from postcolonial, feminist, narrative therapeutic, and pastoral theological perspectives. Analyzing their narrative environments illuminated how their grief, defense mechanisms, depression, low self-esteem, overcompensating behaviors, and relationship troubles intertwined with the hidden narratives of colonialism, racism, classism, sexism, and Christianity.

Faith provided an anchor of stability and consolation for all three interviewees. Expanding Fowler's definitions of faith, I explored how faith played an important role in affirming their identities, beauty, and worth in countercultural ways. In Eirene's case, however, her faith community failed to provide a safe and trustworthy holding space, which resulted in her perspective of mistrust in the world and in herself. Her church's teachings about the apocalypse exacerbated all the other fears and insecurities that were brewing in the impermanence that characterized her childhood and youth. This contributed to feelings of self-doubt and incompetence. When she was part of her college Christian fellowship, she felt the joys of community but also the anxiety of needing to meet

the high spiritual standards of everyone else who seemed to be so holy. Since their faith seemed so “advanced” compared to hers, Eirene struggled with deep insecurities and feelings of incompetence. Even when she volunteered to be a chaperone for a charismatic youth group, she was amazed by how much more confident and competent these youth seemed to be in ministry. Again, she felt further entrenched in shame and doubt.

Eirene’s experiences in conservative Christian faith communities pointed to several things. First, faith communities can send important countercultural messages to minoritized TCKs about their value, purpose, worth, and belonging that can be a great source of comfort and confidence. Second, faith communities can do great good or great harm depending on the kind of holding environments they provide. A good enough holding environment can withstand the mysteries and ambiguities of life, God, and human beings, making room for the whole range of human experience—doubts, anger, sadness, or depression. Punitive or silencing faith communities, other hand, can damage TCKs’ budding identity formation.

For this specific population of TCKs, biblical call narratives were significant to their identity formation because they were missionary children. Because their parents followed God’s call to different countries, biblical narratives, such as Abraham leaving his country and family, helped them make sense of their highly disruptive lives. Eclipsed by these dominant theological narratives, however, TCKs’ experiences of ambiguous loss, grief, anger, or pain were often silenced. Minimizing or denying these losses helped them continue to perform to belong and be accepted. Sophia and Eirene showed a growing attentiveness to these painful, disorienting, and silenced stories in their lives through holding environments that they each created for themselves.

Vera tended to minimize the hardships in her life and focus on gratitude and God’s unfailing faithfulness. She had had a good life, and she resisted people assuming that things were hard for her. She tended to approach things more rationally and minimized her experiences of pain as over-

exaggerated or immature. Since our views conflicted here, I wrote notes of my own countertransference and offered examples of how pastoral story companions might practice intercultural sensitivity and empathy to gain better understanding of another's story that does not match our assumptions. Pastoral story companions can gently explore and invite the other into conversation with genuine wonder, curiosity, and respect. When I tried to put myself in Vera's shoes, I was able to appreciate her strengths, testimonies of God's faithfulness, and wisdom rather than be suspicious about repression or denial. I did not live her life, and I needed to honor her story while also noting my observations. Pastoral story companions would do well to practice this kind of intercultural sensitivity and respect when hearing stories that conflict with one's values.

Finally, I offered pastoral theological reflections on how TCKs' repeated experiences of displacement on multiple levels—geographical, cultural, psychological, and spiritual—led them to search for home. How one defines home can reveal a lot about a person. For all three participants, they found home in their faith, but the journey each person took to get there looked different. Brueggemann's sequence of orientation-disorientation-reorientation provided a helpful template to describe the psychological, geographical, and spiritual movements in the TCKs' search for home.

Sophia created home in the silences both in her faith as well as the silenced parts of her past. As she listened to the silences, she created a holding environment for herself where new images of the divine, deeper self-compassion, and greater appreciation for the divinity in her humanity emerged. Eirene's concept of home kept changing through the multiple displacements that she experienced, eventually to the point where she left home—geographically, emotionally, and spiritually. Previously, she struggled with feelings of incompetence especially due to theology that emphasized God's strength and human helplessness, but she moved away from those theological orientations. When faith felt disorienting, she made home in the disorientation. Her life partner helped fill a deep need for stability, security, and intimacy. Within the safe and loving holding

environment that she and her partner created, she was learning to play, explore, and listen to her needs about what she wanted and how to live in the world. Vera, on the other hand, made her home in God, in a theology of orientation. She had a history with God that evidenced God's unfailing faithfulness in her life. While she felt most secure belonging to God, she still felt an unresolved yearning for love. This yearning echoed similar themes stated by Sophia when she first relied on relationships with men to give her comfort and security before learning to care for herself. Eirene was well aware of her deep loneliness and needs for security and intimacy, which she found through co-creating a holding environment with her life partner. Their comments and Vera's craving for love led me to reflect on the theological importance of home as a holding environment, where TCKs are free to listen to and question the silences, play and explore their unfolding identities, and let our deepest longings be held with love and compassion.

Future Implications for the Study

This study focused on a small number of Korean TCKs, who all happened to be Korean children of missionaries. Since Korea continues to send a large number of missionaries around the world (ranking sixth in the world in 2013)⁴⁰⁷, it would be valuable to delve into the life stories of more Korean missionary children. On the other hand, because the participants in this study were children of missionaries and faith was very important to their families, their Christian context became prominent in the data analysis. I wondered what kinds of themes and theological reflections would emerge if the study included non-religiously affiliated, minoritized TCKs and how they narrate their identities. It would also be interesting to interview a more diverse group of minoritized

⁴⁰⁷ Center for the Global Study of Christianity, "Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970-2020: Society, Religion, and Mission," Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, accessed 2018.
<http://www.gordonconwell.edu/ockenga/research/documents/ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf>.

TCKs who are racially and religiously diverse. Their answers would add rich perspectives beyond those offered by Korean Christian women TCKs.

I would also like to focus on the experience of TCK men, since my women participants shared that they thought they had it easier in different cultures because they were women. What kinds of stories do minoritized TCK men tell about themselves? Are they different from TCK women? If so, how?

I noticed that the TCK women hardly knew how much help they needed or whether they were battling depression or psychosomatic symptoms when they were young. They only felt the need looking back in hindsight. I would be interested future studies that help minoritized TCK youth deconstruct their narrative environments and examine how such education practices shape their self-esteem or confidence.

In this study, I discussed the role of language in identity formation very briefly in relation to Vera's mention of norms and values reflected in the Russian language. Future studies can explore more fully how language learning and expression affects identity for TCKs.

Concluding Thoughts

Since faith played such an important and positive role in minoritized TCKs' search for identity and belonging, faith communities should consider how they can help facilitate holding environments where minoritized TCK children and youth can articulate healing and empowering narrative identities. Pastoral story companions can learn from the theological reflections offered by these participants and create resources that nurture and affirm their identities and belonging in God. Theological themes on being citizens of God's kingdom, biblical call narratives, scripture texts about being God's children, Jesus' homelessness and the critically missing years, and other passages affirming one's purpose and identity would be good places to start. Integrating theological reflection

with postcolonial contextual analyses will help prompt minoritized TCKs to gain clarity about their narrative environments that are empowering or damaging to their sense of self.

I conclude with the wisdom and advice of TCK participants to emerging TCKs and those wanting to care for TCKs. First, for the children and youth, Eirene said, “Just hold on. You’re doing all right. Have more fun. Let go of the anal anxiety of perfectionism. Don’t listen to everything your parents say.”⁴⁰⁸

Sophia’s advice was,

The pain was worth overcoming. The pain is not the end. It could actually be a driving force for new things. Be kind to yourself. You don’t have to try so hard to fit in or meet expectations. Rather, appreciate yourself. Delight and rejoice in your experiences and how they form you rather than feeling like you have to form yourself in a certain way to be acceptable. Find your passion. Instead of being lost and confused and staying in that space, let that birth in you something new. And give yourself time and space, a permission to just be, and that’s okay. You don’t have to constantly strive for something. That’s tiring. Then you just crash. And then you end up where in my case in an abusive relationship. Or in an unhealthy place. So give yourself the time and space to just be you.⁴⁰⁹

Vera advised, “Enjoy your experience because it is special. Enjoy and embrace. Trust in God. I saw some TCKs not engaging the local culture or learning only English because they thought think other languages were inferior. Immerse yourself in the richness of their language and culture.”⁴¹⁰

Finally, their advice to those wanting to care for TCKs was surprisingly the same and simple—1) Don’t assume. Eirene said, “Don’t assume that you know what they’re like or exactly what they’re feeling or going through. Let them speak for themselves. Don’t categorize or lump them.” 2) The second unanimous advice was simply *to listen*. Sophia said, “You don’t have to give them advice or guidance. [...] They just need a place to be heard and understood. They have

⁴⁰⁸ Eirene, Interview by author, October 26, 2016.

⁴⁰⁹ Sophia, Interview by author, November 9, 2016.

⁴¹⁰ Vera, Interview by author, October 13, 2016.

experienced things that you may never experience. So have that humility to learn rather than trying to impart something onto them.”⁴¹¹

⁴¹¹ Eirene, Interview by author, October 26, 2016.

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Appendix A:**Research Participation Letter****Principal Investigator:**

Eunbee Ham
3681 N. Decatur Rd. APT T16
Decatur, GA 30032
(404) 386-8743
Email: eham2@emory.edu

Institutional Review Board
1599 Clifton Rd, Atlanta, GA 30322
(404) 712-0720
Email: irb@emory.edu

Dear Participant,

The following information is given to you to help you decide whether or not you wish to take part in the present study. You should be aware that you are in no way obliged to participate in this study and are free to withdraw from the study at any time without recourse.

Description of Study: Eunbee Ham is a doctoral student at Emory University conducting a research that fulfills a partial requirement for the Doctor of Theology (Th.D) degree in Pastoral Counseling. This research seeks to give voice to the experiences of identity formation for female Korean American Third Culture Kids (TCKs) who are now young adults. The research aims to name and articulate the experiences of Korean American women TCKs, helping to raise awareness on the complex and unique experiences of identity formation women TCKs. The data from this research will be used to develop spiritual and psychological resources for Korean American women TCKs as they make sense of their identities amidst shifting contexts.

Data will be collected in a three-hour interview. Data collection will involve documents (written portion by research participant), observation notes made by the investigator, audiovisual material (video/audio recording of the interview), interview (transcripts of the interview), as well as any other material shared by the participant. I will meet with you during my analysis and after analyzing my findings to ensure that I represent your story fairly and honor your authorship in this research.

Confidentiality: Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. All identifiers will be taken out as soon as possible, and information gathered in the study will be kept strictly confidential unless disclosure is mandated by law. Electronic data will be kept encrypted and password protected in the researcher's computer. Hard data collected in the study will be secured in a locked file box with exclusive access to the investigator. Data will be stored according to Emory University's data retention requirements.

The participant should be aware that this study may be published some time in the future. Despite all the precautions taken to hide all identifiers, parts of your story may reveal your identity to those who know you.

Risks/Benefits to the Participant: This study poses minimal risks for participants, but participants may experience intense emotions related to the life experiences they choose to share. In such cases, appropriate referrals for counseling can be made. The benefits of participation in this study include: 1) An opportunity to raise awareness regarding the experience of identity formation for Korean American women TCKs; 2) Provide possible insight and wisdom for young women TCKs who are looking to make sense of their identities and belonging; 3) Make an important contribution to the development of psychological and spiritual resources for caring with Korean American women TCKs.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during your participation in the study. Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent will be given to you to keep.

Having read this letter with full understanding of the contents of this document, I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

Research participant

Date

Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix B:**Preliminary Screening Questionnaire****Age:****Gender:****Race:****Citizenship:****Country of birth:**

Country	Age when you moved to another country	How many years did you live in this country?

Appendix C:**Referral List of Therapists**

Heesun Kim, Ph.D., Pastoral Counselor
407 Hakkwan
52 Ewhayeodae-gil, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul, 03760, Korea
(82)-10-4955-5563

David Kim, Ph.D., LPC.
Research Institute for Counseling & Education
3000 Langford Rd. Building #300
Norcross, GA 30071

Michael Cook, Th.D., LMFT
Micah Counseling Services
316 Peachtree Parkway North
Peachtree City, Georgia 30269
[\(404\) 620-2420](tel:4046202420)