

Negotiating Identities and Re-acculturation of Second-Generation Korean Americans: The Role of Ethnic Media and Peer Group Dynamics

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between the identity building process of second-generation Korean Americans, peer group dynamics and the mass media. Second generations are different from their parents in the sense that they have several stages of development in their identities as Americans, Korean Americans and Asian Americans. In-depth interviews with Korean-American teenagers living in the Boston area revealed that not until later in their teens when they meet with Koreans who come directly from Korea, do they think of their dual identities. But once they encounter Koreans, they feel that they are different from their peer Americans but even more so from Koreans. The process of identity formation at this stage goes through a complicated process that I termed "re-acculturation" and, at this stage, the Korean-American peer group serves as a social support mechanism, whereas the Korean media helps them to bond with their peers and family.

Keywords: immigration, second generation, Korean Americans, cultural identity, acculturation, re-acculturation, enculturation, assimilation, biculturalism

* This work was supported by the Korea Research Foundation Grant funded by the Korean Government (MOEHRD, Basic Research Promotion Fund) (KRF-2006-321-B01130).

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Introduction

Becoming a genuine member of a society is phrased as “assimilation” by sociologists, and the process of becoming assimilated, “acculturation” by social psychologists. Others refer to successful assimilation as biculturalism or integration. Whatever the discipline or theory, the process can be summarized as that of becoming accustomed to a foreign society and fitting in. The outcome could either be a success or a failure, depending on how well the person is accepted and how much the person feels like he or she really belongs. It is a very complicated process involving several agents and dimensions.

This study is an attempt to examine the dynamic process of how identities are formed during adolescence. The impact of ethnic media and peer group dynamics is emphasized since they are significant hallmarks of the adolescent period.

Recently, many studies have focused on the uniqueness of the experience of second generations compared to their parents’ generation (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2004; Portes and Rumbaut 2001b; Rajiva 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2005; Zhou 1999; Zhou and Xiong 2005). The greatest difference is that they lack meaningful connections to the “old” world. Yet they still feel different from people in the host country. Because of this dual identity, studies have repeatedly found that they straddle the old and new worlds but are fully part of neither.

Adolescence is an important stage for shaping identities. Second generations learn to see themselves as different at this age, and for them it has a different meaning compared to their immigrant parents’ “becoming American.” They have grown up as Americans and yet there are differences and uncertainty in their identities compared to their American friends (Rajiva 2006). In this study, I focus on two different factors that influence the process of identity formation. First is the effect of ethnic media use. The other is the influence of peer groups, especially among the second generations.

Mass media use in general is a pervasive and universal trend, especially with digital services such as the internet being used in vir-

tually all homes. In a research study conducted in 2007, 48 percent of internet users said they had visited a video-sharing site such as YouTube. Only a year ago, in December 2006, 33 percent of internet users said they had visited such sites (Rainie 2008). Among them, teenagers are by far the most active content users and creators online. The differences between traditional mass media and digital media are that there are more choices in content and, in the case of digital media, interpersonal contact is usually available along with the media services.

The experience of ethnic media by the second generation may be different from that of their parents’. While their parents grew up in another country and came to America after their cultural identities were already fixed, the second generation grew up in the American social culture environment. At home, they communicate with their parents perhaps in the context of their ethnic identities but outside the home, especially in school, they speak English to communicate with people in the host society. Even at home, because their parents have also adjusted and maybe have been acculturated to the American society, their original ethnic identity may not be completely realized.

This state of not belonging anywhere may be a unique bonding mechanism among the second generation. They cannot fully identify themselves with their parents or their American friends and not even with the ethnic media they consume.

In sum, this study aims to explore the meaning of culture to adolescents who are going through a tremendous amount of change in their lives and how the ethnic culture helps or burdens them during that process. Since people’s cultural identities are constructed and negotiated through communication with people who are significant to them, an examination of peer group dynamics and the context of media use should shed light on the process of how second-generation adolescents negotiate their identities.

Literature Review

Migration and its results have been studied extensively in sociology, anthropology and social psychology, especially in the context of assimilation and acculturation. There are also a few studies in the area of intercultural communication that examines the issues of interpersonal communication among ethnic groups. Sociological studies usually focus on the change of society or group at the macro level (Waters 1999; Waters and Jimenez 2005), while social psychology and communication studies focus on the personal experience of acculturation and identity formation (Berry 1997, 2001, 2005). However, few studies have attempted to link the acculturation process with ethnic media use, which is an important element in the forming of ethnic identities. Previous studies on acculturation of immigrants and the role of ethnic media within the immigrant community are reviewed here.

Studies on Immigrants' Adjustment

Studies on immigrants use the term "acculturation" and "assimilation" frequently. Kim distinguishes the terms, with acculturation being defined as the change in individuals whose primary learning has been in one culture and who take over traits from another culture, whereas "assimilation" is the process of a more comprehensive change whereby immigrants become absorbed into the mainstream society (2001, 15-16). The process of assimilation of pluralism is the subject of immigrant studies (Subervi-Velez 1986).

On the other hand, the process by which a person adapts to surrounding cultural forces throughout the years of socialization is "enculturation." This is a general term that applies to anyone and not particularly to immigrants. This is similar to the socialization process. This programming gives the individual the status of a recognizable member of that group (Kim 2001, 47). This continuous learning process occurs through communication. Enculturation has three dimensions: communicative competence, functional fitness, and cul-

tural identity (Kim 2001, 48-49). The process of belonging to a group means acquiring the language and social skills, psychological internalization and group identity. Cultural (ethnic) identity serves as a frame of reference or a system of meaning that is shared with the community or ethnic group. It differentiates one group from another (Kim 2001, 49).

Cross-cultural adaptation is a slightly different process. There is a "deculturation" process, which is the unlearning of existing cultural norms and replacing it with new ones, i.e. acculturation. Assimilation is the completed form of acculturation. Changes in environment causes stress because there is always a conflict between the desire to retain old customs and keep the original identity and the need for acculturation to adjust to the new environment (Kim 2001). Acculturation is a process immigrants go through after they move to the host country.

Whether we should call the second generations' adaptation process "enculturation" or "acculturation" is not clear from previous studies. Sometimes it is referred to as a socialization process and sometimes as an assimilation process. But it seems reasonable to apply the concept of "enculturation" to the second generation since they grow up in the host society as citizens.

The complexity of immigrants' assimilation lies in the fact that most of them have different family members and sometimes there is a gap among the generations in a family. This happens especially if the immigrant family has children after they immigrate into a new society. Portes and Rumbaut (2001b) distinguishes different types of assimilation. Dissonant acculturation is when the first generation's adaptation process is slower than that of the second generation, often resulting in a downward assimilation. Consonant acculturation is when the process of assimilation is simultaneous and therefore results in upward assimilation. Selective acculturation is when the second generation negotiates by attaining biculturalism. In any case, the roles of social capital such as ethnic community and structural embeddedness are crucial factors.

Second generations have a unique experience compared to their

parents. As children of immigrants, they are blended into their immigrant community but also have grown up as Americans and are more familiar with American culture than their parents (Kibria 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2005). Segmented assimilation refers to the divergent patterns of adaptation among immigrants. This perspective accounts for contextual factors of the host society and flexible patterns of adjustment of immigrants and their children. This is termed the “new second generation” (Gans 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993). A study on segmented assimilation in France shows that the mechanism depends on the host country settings and cannot be uniformly generalized (Silberman, Alba, and Fournier 2007).

Jo (2002) notes the shortcoming of the segmented assimilation approach. First, it fails to acknowledge the variation within an ethnic group because it focuses on the differences between different groups. But as the Korean immigrant population shows, there is a great diversity within the immigrant group. Another flaw is that they fail to see the link with the home country, which is crucial in maintaining the ethnicity. Also, the indicators of successful adaptation to the host society should go beyond educational outcomes. It is inevitable that there is a glass ceiling as we can infer from the fact that despite the high proportion of professionals there are few top-level executives.

There are dubious features of Asian immigrants. First, because of their race, they are different from the former European descendants that easily merged into the dominant “white” mainstream. They also differ from other racial minority groups, such as Hispanics or African-Americans, to the extent that they fare well in socioeconomic measures (Kibria 2002). However, Kibria’s study also shows the double marginalization of second-generation immigrants. Her study shows that it is about race as much as it is about culture. The identity conflict that Korean-Americans and Chinese-Americans experience while growing up was mostly the “racialized marginality from the identity of American” (2002, 28). The younger generation experiences this disparity, which Kibria (2002) terms “a part yet apart.” They struggle to “fit in” with school and society but also search for identity and community coherence, etc.

Jung and Lee’s (2004) study on Korean American college students suggests that Korean Americans do not assimilate into U.S. culture in a linear way due to their daily cultural encounters with in-group and out-group members. This is contrary to Kim’s (1977) earlier study, which suggests that the adaptation process is more or less linear. Kibria accounts race socialization within the family as being more open than traditional “socialization” that occurs among the powerful and the powerless, which is a more rigid and unidirectional process. Rather she uses the term “messages” that are shared among the parents and children that convey the lessons of race and are negotiated with the children and not handed down vertically. Koreans were told to be proud of their tradition but in a subtle way.

Min and Kim (2000) uses personal narrative method to examine ethnic identity and related issues of fifteen young Asian-American professionals. The “new second generation” of recent years has a strong bilingual and bicultural orientation, which is contrary to the classical acculturation theory where becoming Americans means losing the ethnic identity. Transnational communication technology enables immigrants to maintain networks with their home country. The cultural policy that emphasizes diversity could also be another factor. Results show that, as children, the second generation resists their ethnic language and culture but become bicultural as they grow older. They also acquire interest and pride in their heritage when they leave home and go to college. It was also found that acculturation may not be a prerequisite for social assimilation. Despite their strong bicultural experiences, Asian Americans were comfortable making friends with other ethnic groups. Biculturalism is a useful concept to embrace the second generations’ assimilation pattern. Rather than acculturating, which means to give up one’s ethnic culture and adopt the host culture, individuals are seen as maintaining competence within both cultures without losing one’s cultural identity (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton 1993).

According to Berry (2005) and Berry and others (2006), immigrants can both accept sociocultural domains of a new society and also retain some of their old one. Depending on the extensiveness of

relationships to new and old societies, Berry (1997) proposed four forms of acculturation—integration, assimilation, segregation and marginalization. Integration means maintaining cultural identities of both host and originating countries. Being bicultural means having both identities in continuum. When immigrants lose relationships with both societies, they experience marginalization. Assimilation is when immigrants lose their ethnic identity and become assimilated to the host country. Segregation involves the retaining of their original culture without adopting new ones.

Adapting Gordon's (1978) seven dimensions of assimilation, Lee, Sobal, and Frongillo (2003) identified dimensions of acculturation in order to measure the bicultural characteristics of Korean-Americans. Lee, Sobal, and Frongillo (2003) found that Korean and American cultural, identification and civic dimensions had a negative relationship. They also found that socioeconomic characteristics, age and length of stay in the host country were important factors influencing whether a person was segregated, assimilated or integrated. The variation could be observed since the sample consisted mostly of 1.5 generation and only 10 percent of second-generation immigrants.

Shi and Lu's (2007) study on biculturalism investigated the relationship between bilingualism and biculturalism on second-generation adolescents and young adults. They found differences among adolescents and young adults in their perceptions of cultural identities. Adolescents had a harder time living in two different cultures and wanted to belong to mainstream American culture, which seemed "normal" to them in everyday life settings. However, young adults were enjoying their bicultural experience and fully functional either way. Shi and Lu's interpretation of this age difference is because the perceived social pressure of fitting into the mainstream culture becomes less salient, while a desire of self-discovery and self-affirmation becomes more significant.

The forming of ethnic identity is an on-going process. People constantly define and redefine their ethnic identity. An ethnographic study on immigrant Filipinos suggest that the ethnic identification process is a dynamic and complex social phenomenon that has been

predicted by either the assimilationist or pluralist models (Espiritu 1994). Jo's (2002) account of ethnicity is also not fixed. Ethnicity is constantly shaped and reshaped through interaction with others.

The complexity of the second generation's acculturation compared to the parents' generation is that they have to struggle with their parents' degree of acculturation and usually there is a gap between that of parents and children (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Zhou 1997). The process of adaptation is influenced by the human and financial capital their immigrant parents bring along, family relations, and social ties. For the second generation, there is another dimension—that of their peer group, which is also going through similar phases of enculturation.

Media's Effect on Identity Formation of Young People

Mass media's role in the acculturation of immigrants has been studied extensively in the field of communication. Social cognitive theory and cultivation theory suggest that exposure to certain cultural content can change and mold people's values and attitudes. Also, people situated in a foreign cultural setting learn from mass media messages to adjust to the society as quickly as possible (Moon and Park 2007). Host country media is known to ease the acculturation process of immigrants, whereas the ethnic media hinders the process. There is a strong tie between media consumption and the individual level of national belonging. But the differences in technology have contrasting effects.

A study on media use among Latinos indicates that the heritage level of the ethnic language and cultural identification was an important factor in determining an individual's use of mass media for cultural maintenance (Rios and Gaines 1998). The media's role in the acculturation process has been studied by Kim (1988), Kim and Gudykunst (1988), and Kim and Kim (2004). According to Kim (1988), the use of ethnic media by immigrants decreases rapidly over time and interaction with the dominant society media accelerates the acculturation process of the immigrants.

Studies by Jeffres (1983) and Jeffres, Dobos and Lee (1988), on the other hand, look mostly at second- or third-generation European immigrants. Social stratification, such as social class and neighborhood, influences communication patterns and use of ethnic media. These factors influence the ethnicity and ethnic identity of minority groups. Local ethnic media use is linked with the maintenance and reinforcement of ethnic identification. Repeatedly, studies suggest that there is a link between ethnic media use and the maintenance of cultural identities.

Previous studies have focused mainly on print and local broadcasting media that is provided in ethnic languages. Naturally the uses of these media have an effect of reinforcing the ethnic culture and identities. It also usually hinders the acculturation process since immigrants who use their own media have less incentive to blend into the mainstream because they already feel at home.

It is a known fact that media is related to identity formation and maintenance. Studies have repeatedly found that consumption of both ethnic and host country media influences the acculturation and adjustment of immigrants (Jeffres 2000; Bahk and Jandt 2004; Kim 1988). Indirect experience through mass media consumption helps immigrants adjust to American culture while exposure to ethnic media keeps them connected to their original culture (Jeffres 1999; Kim 1977; Lee and Tse 1994; Rios and Gaines 1998; Shim and Slamon 1990; Tan et al. 1997; Walker 1999).

Bahk and Jandt's (2004) study on Korean immigrants and sojourners shows that Koreans spend more time on ethnic media than the U.S. media. English proficiency is positively correlated with the host country's media usage in the case of first-generation immigrants. Xiaoming and Runping (2004) suggest a transitional media use model, where the use of media by immigrants is a dynamic, complicated and changing process. Immigrants typically go through three stages—disorientation, integration, and adaptation. Their empirical study on Chinese immigrants in Singapore has significant findings. As the immigrants' needs for information changes during the adjustment, their pattern of media uses also change. Their demand for local

news increases as they adapt to the host society, and this does not necessarily mean that their interest in home-country news decreases. There are also other attempts to link acculturation and media, such as Woo and Dominick's (2003) study on the interaction between acculturation levels and TV program effects.

Ethnic media effects on cultural identities or acculturation is not yet clear. Most studies focus on the maintenance function of ethnic media and its hindering effects on acculturation (Jeffres 1999; Chaffee et al. 1991; Lee and Tse 1994; Rios and O'Gaines 1998; Shim and Slamon 1990; Walker 1999). However, most ethnic media in these studies are locally produced content, which means that the main function of the "ethnic media" is to help immigrants adapt to the new environment, that is, U.S. society. These usually portray culturally hybrid messages, which reflect both ethnic and American values, and the impact may not be as strong (Moon and Park 2007).

This characteristic of local ethnic media is radically different from content teenagers download directly from the Internet from their home-country's websites or P2P services. If we agree with the assumption that the mass media molds and influences cultural values, the changing media environment should have a different affect on the consumers of media products due to differences in content.

Digital technologies have made both mainstream and ethnic media use more complicated. First of all, ethnic media is no longer local. Through the Internet, anyone can gain access to foreign or ethnic media. Second, print media has increasingly less significance in the lives of the younger generation. In ethnic communities, local ethnic newspapers have served the function of keeping the community together. However, the younger generation is making less use of this media. Third, ethnic media consumption is not necessarily based on language proficiency. It has become more of a subculture that people consume with their peers. Second-generation Korean-Americans consume a lot of Korean media products but were usually limited to music, entertainment shows and dramas, which requires less language proficiency compared to news and newspapers. They also found that the Internet and mobile phones were used to expand their

interactions with Korean peers and family members and indicated increasingly intra-ethnic communication with the Korean-American community (Yeh et al. 2005).

First-generation immigrants turn to ethnic media mainly because of the language barriers in consuming mainstream media. However, in the case of second-generation immigrants, language is seldom the barrier in assimilating to American culture, since their first language is usually English. Furthermore, they have difficulties in speaking their ethnic language. So ethnic media has a different meaning for them, compared to their parents' generation that relies on ethnic media for substantial reasons.

Studies on the role of ethnic media or community media with a pluralistic view emphasize the role of news media (Jeffres, Dobos and Lee 1988; Shim and Salmon 1990; Viswanath and Arora 2000). However, there has been less research on the effects of entertainment media such as television shows or music. But we should note that the actual consumption of media content by the second generation is predominantly for entertainment.

Cultural identity is negotiated through various interpersonal and mediated communicative acts such as interaction with people within the ethnic group as well as Americans, family, church, school, and the media. The role of the media was more of a communication medium and less of media content with cultural values embedded in the messages (Jung and Lee 2004). Louie (2006) examined the role of ethnic and transnational orientations in the identities of second-generation Chinese and Dominicans. Frequent contact with the home country increases ethnic identification.

Although they do not entail direct contact, consuming media products may have similar effects to having direct contact. In Park's (2005) study, the perception of a culture or country was highly dependent upon the exposure to media messages.

Although previous studies of acculturation, such as Gordon (1981) and Lee, Sobal, and Frongill (2003), distinguish the cultural dimension from the structural dimension, it is possible that the two dimensions interact with each other. Media consumption is a major

part of friendship in adolescents, especially since the new media devices often have a communicative function. Friendship serves cultural functions as a means for transmitting the society's norms. What is socially appropriate and what is not within the peer group shapes a person's behavior and boundaries (Horenczyk and Tatar 1998).

Research Questions and Methods

Research Questions

Most studies on immigrants focus on the first generation and how they adjust to the host society. Although the second generation do not experience the abrupt change from one culture to another as much as their parents, they still experience some uncertainty in their identities and the problem of social assimilation still remains. However, a linear model of acculturation or assimilation may not be directly applicable to the second generation. The models of acculturation and assimilation assume that there is a goal of becoming well adjusted to the host society. In the case of the second generation, their conflict seems to start out later in their lives, after they become adults. This is because they grow up as Americans fully armed with the language and cultural skills as an American. Then, at a certain point, they realize they are not "truly" Americans in many ways including their looks and life values.

In this study, the question regarding the uniqueness of acculturation of the second generation is asked. Drawing from previous studies on acculturation, children and adolescents are influenced by family, friends, and mass media. So the effects of these three different forces were taken into account. Two research questions were set forth in this study.

Research Question 1:

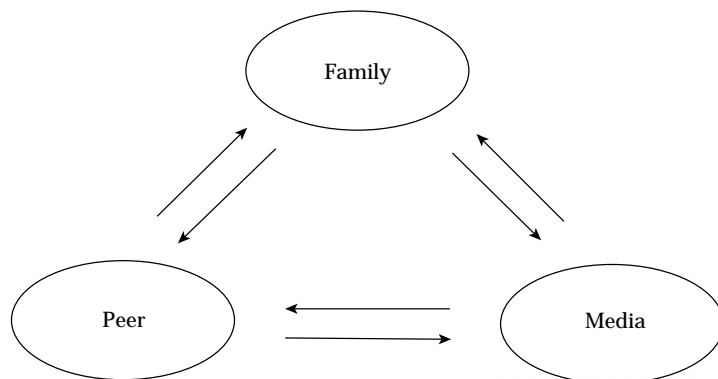
What are the characteristics of the acculturation process of second-generation Korean Americans during their adolescence?

Research Question 2:

What is the role of ethnic media, family, and peer group in the formation of ethnic identities during adolescence?

Less research has been done on the “process” of becoming assimilated or becoming “American.” We need to look at the younger people who are going through the various phases to fully understand this process. Intra-ethnic communication is known to build cultural identities. Intra-ethnic communication occurs at three levels; family, friends (peer), and mass media. Each affects each other in a unique way, especially during adolescence. Adolescence is a period of achieving independence from parents and family. Often, they prefer their peer group as reference groups. After they grow up, they may remember their adolescence as being greatly involved with their parents since they have inherited a lot of their cultural background within the family context. However, in reality this may not be the case. So we have to look at what really happens during the process. Also, the mass media plays an important role regardless of race and identity. Recently due to digital technologies, there is an influx of a diverse range of media content. And most ethnic groups tend to consume mass media originating from their home country.

Figure 1. Intra-ethnic Interaction among Family, Peer, and Ethnic Media



I aim to look at the relationships between family (parents), peer group, and ethnic media among Korean-American adolescents, and how the three distinct relationships shape the identities of Korean-Americans during their teens. According to Min and Kim, studies based on high-school students are limited in examining identities because the pan-ethnic identity is often suppressed in early years only to emerge during early adulthood (2000, 736). At what point and during which event the ethnic identity is actually formed is the core question to be asked in this study.

Research Methods

A qualitative interview method was used to answer the research questions set forth. Interviews with 1.5 and second-generation Korean Americans were conducted in July 2007 in two different Korean churches in the Boston area. Interviews took place in the church before and after the ceremony and/or Sunday school, or on other days by appointment. According to Zhou and Kim (2006), ethnic-language schools and churches are where immigrant families find social support and serve as community centers regardless of religion or education. Korean churches serve this community function in many cities in the United States.

All the research participants were fully informed of the nature of the research. The researcher conducted the interviews in English. Some students were in groups of three or four with their close friends so that it would ease the talking. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and all were audio-taped. The interview was unstructured so that young students could feel free to discuss any relevant issues. Most interviews started out by asking the life story of the interviewee and how they think they are different and unique from Americans. Most questions were focused on the conflict between Korean and American values and ways of life, school dynamics, church and Korean-American community and the media. The recordings were transcribed into a written version that reached a total of 60 pages, double-spaced. Pseudonyms were used in the interpretation of results for

confidentiality. A few additional interviews with several research participants were conducted during the analyses in August and December 2007 through instant messaging.

The interviewees were recruited with the help of the Sunday school teachers and sampled so that there would be a diverse range of age groups. The main guideline for choosing the interviewees was that they were children of immigrants; therefore, they could be either U.S.-born or foreign-born and migrated to the United States. In either case they share the common denominator of immigrant parents (adapted from Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). Since the

Table 1. Summary of Respondents

Name	Gender	Age	Parents' Immigration Year	Church
David	M	16	Around 1987	A
Ethan	M	13	7 years ago	A
Amy*	F	30	When I was 6-7	A
Ben	M	15	When I was 9	A
Penny*	F	31	1992	A
Sophie	F	14	1960s	A
Sarah	F	15	Before I was born	A
Taylor	M	14	2000	A
Susan	F	13	Before I was born	A
Michelle	F	16	2000	A
Sydney	F	15	1996/Born in Japan	B
Clara	F	14	1988	B
Isabelle	F	15	Before I was born	B
Sandra	F	17	2003	B
Kevin	F	16	2001	B
Stan	M	15	1990	B
Steve	M	16	2001	B
Robert	M	17	20 years ago	B
Jeremy	M	16	1970s	B
Jim	M	16	20 years ago	B
Matt	M	17	1990	B

* Sunday school teachers.

recruiting was from two local churches in Boston, the sample is not representative of the second generation in Boston or elsewhere in the United States and cannot be generalized to the wider second-generation Korean population. However, this study was an attempt to explore the relationship between peer group dynamics, ethnic media consumption, influence of parents, and the formation of cultural identities of "Korean" and/or "American."

The interviewees are listed in Table 1.

Among the 21 interviewees, 2 of them were adults. The two adults were both Sunday school teachers, who were aware of what adolescents go through, as well as being second-generation immigrants themselves. Excluding the two adults, the mean age of the sample was 15 (SD= 1.57). The youngest was 12, and the oldest was 18 years old. All of them lived in the Boston metropolitan area. 1.5 generation comprised 36.8 percent of the sample all others were second- (or third-) generation immigrants.

Findings

The Re-Acculturation Process of Second Generation Adolescents

Kibria's "a part yet apart" (2002, 10) was confirmed in this study. Second generations did not fully identify themselves with Americans or with Koreans.

I accept that [Americans] are different but they are also my closest friends. We are a little different from Americans, a lot different from Koreans and most similar to Korean Americans (Robert).

But there was variance in the degree. This depended on how much they had been exposed to Koreans. Most of the adolescents in the study did not fully identify themselves as Americans but were even further away from Koreans. Those who have had contact with Koreans or have been to Korea identified themselves as being even more

different from Koreans.

Most of them felt that Korean students who had recently moved to the States were quite different from themselves. Sometimes this caused them discomfort, partly because they felt obliged to help them fit in but could not really be of help, because they were so different from each other. However, the discomfort was mainly because, before they met “real” Koreans, they had thought of themselves as Koreans. But encountering Koreans caused them to feel this distance and make them confused about their identities.

[Koreans] have these stereotypes of Korean Americans and I would feel different when I am [in Korea]. We have different values (Sydney).

Kids who come straight from Korea and can't speak English are shy and hang around with each other. It's uncomfortable (Ben).

We have different ideas of fun. [Students who come from Korea] go to *PC bang*, *noraebang*.¹ [Korean Americans] like to play sports, hang out, eat, talk. . . . We have different play cultures (Jim).

Instead of feeling different among white Americans, it is usually when the second generations come into contact with Koreans who have recently come to America that they realize they are different from everyone else, including Koreans. In other words, the sense of identity is stimulated when they encounter Koreans, whom they had vaguely identified themselves with. But once they meet with Koreans in reality, they realize that they are in fact very different from them.

I didn't know that I was different. I always had white kids around

1. *PC bangs* are Korean internet cafes that provide fully equipped PCs for online game playing. Going to *PC bangs* with friends is an adolescent culture in Korea especially for boys. In areas where there are large Korean communities, there are *PC bangs* that usually operate for Korean consumers. *Noraebangs* are Korean karaoke parlors where small rooms are equipped with karaoke systems. Usually rooms are rented by the hour. Going to *noraebang* together is also another form of group culture for Koreans, regardless of age or gender.

me. I never thought I was different until I turned 13 or 14 (Amy).

At some point, teenagers become self-conscious about their ethnicity and identity. Until that period, they are safe in identifying themselves with their peer group at school, which is predominantly white Americans.

[Although I am one of only three Korean Americans in school] I don't feel different because at school they don't really care (Clara).

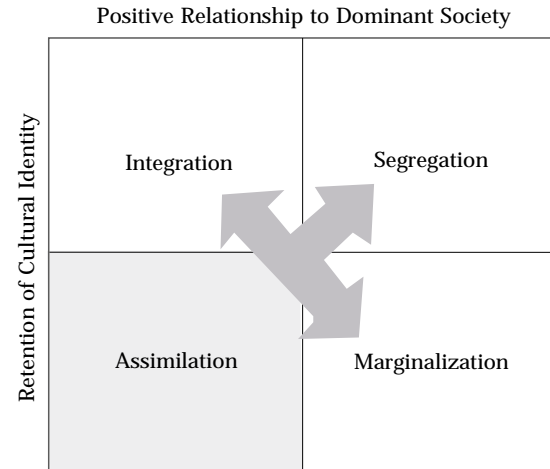
When realizing their dual identities, they are also forced to choose—maybe not intentionally—in which direction they will negotiate their identities. When they interact with Koreans, they realize whether or not they are marginalized, segregated, or integrated. The young second generation experiences assimilation as they grow up, but when they reach a certain age, with the contact and interaction with their originating culture, they move towards either marginalization, segregation or integration.

It starts out as denial of my identity. All of a sudden, I don't want to be a Korean-American, I want to be just “American” but when I see myself and my family, I feel frustrated. . . . That occurs during your teenage years, when you are so rebellious of everything. But as time goes by, you accept yourself and sometimes even feel glad to be a part of the Korean heritage. I think the role of parents at this stage is very very important (Penny).

The guidance of parents, with the help of friends and maybe the media, directs the path the adolescent will go through. Most non-Asian, non-European immigrants have gone the path of marginalization or segregation, but in Asian communities, it is often the case that they go towards integration.

The acculturation processes of second-generation immigrants are in fact acculturation to the “Korean-American” ethnic group, de-cultivating themselves from “Americans.” This is in contrast with their parents, where acculturation means becoming “American.” This

Figure 2. Model of Re-Acculturation of Second Generations



means the acculturation process is neither a unidirectional nor a static one. Second-generation immigrants grow up becoming assimilated to the society with few doubts, but when they reach the age when cultural identities emerge as something significant in their lives, they experience a new adaptation process. It is more of an enculturation experience. They are “enculturated” into becoming Americans, but eventually experience acculturation during adolescence. Since it is going back to being “Korean Americans” from “Americans,” we should call this process “re-acculturation.” A new term “re-acculturation”—or the process of becoming acculturated back into the originating ethnic group—can be applied to this phenomenon.

They already have the language skills, cultural identity, and functional fitness of the main society. So it is more of getting acculturated to the Korean identity later on, after they reach adolescence, or when they start thinking about their differences and identities. Through the interviews, it was found that there is a transition period sometime between adolescence and adulthood. In the younger ado-

lescent group, there was little confusion or conflict regarding cultural identities. However, for older teenagers, self-consciousness was growing and was sometimes expressed in self-denial and conflict. But this could eventually balance out as a bicultural personality in adulthood. In this study, I looked at the conflict-resolving stages of adolescence and how the communication environment including the media is aiding this process of biculturalism.

The Process of Becoming Bicultural

Becoming re-acculturated means to become bicultural and to feel comfortable identifying themselves with both Koreans and Americans. During this re-acculturation process, social support from family, peer and the media was found to be crucial. Often times the conflict starts within the family and is resolved among peers. Mass media served as a bridge between the two groups.

1) Family Environment

Parents’ values and parenting style have a great impact on the children’s social adjustment. Korean parents are typically strict, which results in more conflict with their children. The immigrant parents often emphasized Korean values, and the children sometimes struggled to balance their parents’ wishes and their life outside of the home. Conflict with parents is the starting point where second-generation adolescents start to become self-conscious of being different.

[My parents are] much more strict. If I hang out with my friend one day and go again the next day, she asks me, “Why do you have to go again?” My American friends never have to answer to that kind of question (Isabelle).

We study more [than our American friends]. I always have to keep my house clean. My American friends, they all have maids but my Mom cleans up all the time (Sydney).

My mom's prejudiced, especially when it comes to new friends. She has to check them out first. She gets paranoid (Clara).

My mom is really strict about how I behave, like how I look at them and the manners when I go out of the room They want me to give a good impression for others (Jim).

My parents forced me to speak Korean at home. They are very traditional. It's hard to confront them. My father used to say, "As long as you live under my roof, you have to follow my rules." I kind of felt the difference then (Amy).

The interaction between different ethnic groups in early life serves as a significant factor in forming cultural identities of second generation. So how the family provides such an atmosphere is very important in the beginning stages of re-acculturation. The conflict between family values and school life was resolved by communicating with Korean-American friends who could share the dual identities.

2) Peer Group Influence and Social Support from Korean-American Friends

Friendship serves as means for transmitting information and codes about the normative expectations of society and culture, providing much of the social context that allows proper performance of actions which will be accepted and rewarded by the peer group (Horenczyk and Tatar 1998). Also, friendship is one of the major sources of social support during adolescence (Berndt and Keefe 1995). As observed in the previous analysis, second-generation immigrants experience high levels of social distress, and this can result in high expectations for friendship and support (Horenczyk and Tatar 1998). Peer groups also set the boundaries of behavior and viewpoints. Since the second generation realizes that their parents are different from that of their American friends, they tend to bond easily with Korean-American friends who have similar family backgrounds.

When [American] friends come over, it's hard for them to commu-

nicate with my mom. But when Emma comes over it's like she can speak with her (Clara).

This type of attachment with Korean-American friends further develops into a more intimate relationship. Many of the interviewees talked about how comfortable they were with their Korean-American friends. They make Korean-American friends because they can really talk and do something as opposed to just "hang out" with American friends.

I can be myself. . . . [At the Korean church] you can participate and get involved with the people. I feel more natural especially around my Korean-American friends (Matt).

Honestly, I go to [Korean] church because of my friends. When I go to college, I probably wouldn't go every week but I would go [to church] to meet new people (Jim).

I feel a connection with everyone [at the Korean church] (Jeremy).

The comfort that they feel when they are with Korean-American friends is because they do not have to explain their differences to their friends. Mostly these differences are rooted not in themselves but in their parents' way of life.

Some experienced difficulty in talking to the parents, not only because of language barriers but because of different values and the tendency among immigrant parents to be overworked. Teenagers typically turn to friends for social support. But Korean-American teenagers usually turn to Korean-American friends who are going through a similar experience.

It's difficult to really talk to your parents. They immigrated here to give us a better life and they work all the time. They just want us to get good grades in school. I feel sorry for them and don't want to upset them (Michelle).

Friendship dynamics is an extension of family dynamics. Families go

to church on Sunday to participate in community activities together.² Children of immigrant families make friends who are in similar situations regarding their relationship with their parents, thus forming a social support group. They seek the type of social support that they could not get from their American friends at school.

3) The Role of Ethnic Media

Ethnic media consumption was very pervasive among Korean-American adolescents. It begins at a very early age, because most of the exposure occurs at home with their family.

My family is really into Korean stuff. Every week, my parents will go out to the Korean grocery store to rent videos of Korean dramas and shows. My sister finds all different artists in Korea, music albums, Korean artists living in America. I pretty much consume a lot of Korean stuff, music, drama with my family. It's always around. I like it. American dramas are really boring. But Korean dramas seem more real (Jeremy).

Much of the media consumption was habitual and not selected by the adolescents. Rather they tend to watch along with their family, who is already watching the shows.

I don't really like Korean media. I sometimes watch with my parents, because they watch Korea TV all the time (Robert).

Media consumption was part of a culture that is shared among family and friends. So even for those who did not actively engage in consuming Korean media, most of them were exposed at home.

Basically I watch what my Mom watches (Clara).

2. Although not directly relevant to this study, it should be noted that Korean churches in the U.S. fulfill both an ethnic community and religious function. Among the people, especially teenagers, who go to church, many say they go because they want to meet and bond with other Korean Americans.

I started to listen to Korean music when I was really young. Mom listened in the car (Susan).

When my sister or Mom watches I watch it for a moment. . . . (David).

I watch whatever my family watches (Ethan).

Since the media exposure takes place within the family context, it is also consumed in such a way that they compare their real lives with the media content. Students commented on the "realness" of Korean dramas. For them, American dramas were somehow distant and unreal, while Korea dramas were more like their daily lives and more realistic. The feeling of realness and reality feeds back in the cultural identities of adolescents, and they confirm their family dynamics as a "natural" thing, since they see it on Korea TV all the time.

I think Korean dramas are similar [to life]. But American ones are so unrealistic (Jim).

I sometimes laugh at the jokes because they are so much like my parents and my family (Jeremy).

The usage rate of Korean media was quite high considering the general media usage rate. 43.9 percent of interviewees were consuming Korean TV more than once a week. Korean TV shows were the most

Table 2. Korean Media Use Rate (%)

	Percentage of frequent users of Korean media	Percentage of frequent users of media in general
TV	43.9	82.9
Newspaper	23.1	24.4
Internet	41.5	95.1
Music	41.5	89.5
Games	35	67.5

popular type of Korean media among the second generation.

Among those who actively consume Korean TV shows, it seemed that their sense of “fun” is different from that of American teenagers. They watch Korean TV because it is more “fun.” The sense of fun also has relevance to cultural identities. The early exposure to media in the family context provides the base of their cultural identities that are formed more concretely in their later teens or during their early adult years.

I think Korean stuff is more addictive (Sandra).

The tunes are catchier (Susan).

It's funnier (Steve).

They're usually funny and different. More variety. . . (Sophie).

Korean history is more fun because they are made into dramas (Ethan).

This means that even before they have been re-aculturated as Korean-Americans, they build cultural assets to appreciate Korean media content. It is interesting that many respondents thought of Korean dramas as being “realistic” and American dramas as “unrealistic.” Somehow, their way of life, especially their domestic life, is somewhat similar to the lifestyle or values portrayed on Korean media. Korean dramas set the groundwork for Korean Americans to see the similarities and differences of the people in the drama compared to their own lives.

Korean drama shows how contemporary Koreans live and dress, etc. Teenagers are sentimental and they enjoy looking at how similar they are in appearances but also how different they are (Penny).

Korean mass media served as a bridge between immigrant parents and the second generation. It was also a common ground for interaction among the second generation. Intra-ethnic communication was facilitated by ethnic media. Not only did it provide communication

skills, i.e. language, but was also a common activity among generations that could be shared easily in everyday life. Whether this type of interaction enhances biculturalism is not clear but it does serve as a catalyst for communication within the ethnic group.

4) Integration and Biculturalism

LaFromboise et al. (1993) suggest a model of biculturalism. According to their extensive study on assimilation, acculturation, multicultural fusion and alternation theories, the biculturalism model includes knowledge of cultural beliefs and values, positive attitude toward both groups, bicultural efficacy, communication competency, role repertoire and groundedness. Korean-American churches and Korean-American friends provided the “groundedness,” assuring that they were not alone in their duality. It was not necessarily the language skills that mattered, but more of having cultural capital to understand Korean ways of being.

Previous studies conclude that being bilingual does not necessarily mean having equal mastery of two languages. Bilinguals usually have a preference for one language over the other even if they master both languages well (Dodson 1985). If we use the broad term of being bilingual as being able to understand and speak both languages, most subjects in this study was bilingual.

A questionnaire form was used during the interviews for some questions. On a scale of one to four, the interviewees were asked to report both their English and Korean skills. Consistent with previous

Table 3. Language Skills

	Korean	English
Speak	3.24	3.63
Understand	3.49	3.71
Read	3.02	3.59
Write	2.76	3.51

*Measured on a 4 point scale from “not at all” to “very well.”

studies, spoken language had a higher average than written language. Most of them had learned Korean at home from their parents, who usually encouraged them to speak Korean at home. Language proficiency is found to be important in forming ethnic identities. Second generations often have bilingual skills, which enables them to have at hand the tool to adapt to both cultures.

Older students were aware of their bicultural asset and thought of it as an advantage in getting ahead in society or overcoming their ethnic disadvantage. They had already gone through the “re-acculturation” process and knew that in order to successfully “assimilate” into American society, they had to leverage their cultural ethnicities to benefit their future career.

For the job market, I know I am going to be different. I can speak the [Korean] language and I know the culture. . . . I have something other people don't. So, I have always tried to keep up my [Korean] language (Matt).

But younger students thought of it more as preserving their ethnicity or family values. Younger students have not yet gone through the full process of “re-acculturation” and still have their parents' views embedded in their own values. Since most Korean-American parents emphasize Korean values, the younger students thought that preserving their “original” culture was important. However, nobody could say why it was important. Most students thought they should be proud of being Korean as their parents had always taught them.

I want to speak Korean myself. I like being bilingual and I am really proud of my Korean heritage (Ben).

Students in their late teens had a different self-consciousness and identity compared to early teens. Most students in this study were not aware of their bicultural state. Some of them thought of it as a nuisance and as different from their American friends. This is because they had not yet reached the phase of identifying themselves with pan-Asian Americans, which occurs in early adulthood (Kasinitz,

Mollenkopf, and Waters 2004). However, there was a difference between younger students and older students. Older students were more open to the idea of being “Korean-American” and being different from American friends. In becoming “Asian-American,” teenagers first go through the process of becoming “Korean-American” from being “American.”

Discussion

The most significant finding of this study is that during adolescence, second-generation immigrants go through a re-acculturation process. They form their identities as Korean Americans, which is a specific segment of the population, as opposed to the broader “American” identity of previous years.

In previous studies, acculturation or enculturation was viewed as a linear process. People become “acculturated” or “enculturated.” But this study reveals that the process is far from linear and, especially for young people, the process of acculturation undergoes different phases as they grow up. It was often the case that when students encounter Koreans who came directly from Korea, they realized their differences from Koreans, with whom they had vaguely identified themselves. Once they meet Koreans, they feel that they are even further away from Koreans than Americans.

While the cultural identities of the second generation go through different stages until they reach adulthood, the second-generation teenagers negotiate their identity within the context of family, peer group, and ethnic media. This study found that ethnic media content was functioning not only as a connection with family but also with Korean American friends, who share the same cultural code.

Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters (2004) suggest that the “Asian” identity that is newly built within the new second generation is a process of enrichment, of making new connections and boundaries of identification. Becoming an Asian as opposed to Korean or Chinese may even be the most profound form of assimilation. This phenome-

Table 4. Summary of Major Research Findings

Concept	Explanation	Process
Re-acculturation process	– American Korean-American	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Assimilated during childhood into Americans but go through a re-acculturation process into becoming Korean Americans during adolescence – Family's values, peer group support, and ethnic media play crucial roles in the building of identities as Korean-Americans
Biculturalism	– After the process of re-acculturation, second generations experience the state of biculturalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bicultural as well as bilingual – Enjoying dual identity – Ethnic media consumption starts out at a very early age and shifts the role during the re-acculturation process from family bonding to peer group sharing – The sense of humor and “realness” in ethnic media is unique compared to host country's media

non of assimilating with other Asian Americans seems to occur during adulthood. For younger Korean Americans, they cannot identify themselves with either Koreans or Americans and eventually fit in with Korean Americans. They have not yet become assimilated with other Asian Americans. Since the students in this study were mainly middle- and high-school students and had not yet entered the “pan-Asian” community that colleges provide, they had little or no sense of being “Asian.” Rather, they were in between being “Korean” and “American.”

At least in the adolescent stage, when they are going through the re-acculturation process, second-generation immigrants seem to find social support from their peer Korean-Americans. Among the several

shared activities, sharing their sense of “fun” and entertainment from Korean media was one of them. Consumption of ethnic media starts as a family activity but is extended to peer group activities with their Korean-American friends. Second generations identify themselves with not only the content that is shown on Korean dramas and shows, but also with the peer group who shares the same language and humor. Ethnic media consumption is more than just a cultural activity. It can be viewed as a medium of social interaction among the second generation. This explains why second generations keep consuming ethnic media despite the language barriers.

Many predict that today's second generation will not follow their parents' path of either assimilation or marginalization. Due to communication technologies and easy travel, they may remain active in both countries and become “global citizens” (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters 2004). Biculturalism has also been observed by scholars (Berry 1997). This study sheds light on the process of becoming bicultural and global citizens.

Although this study was a cross-sectional study and did not observe adolescents for a long enough time to examine the changes they go through in terms of identity, it was possible to speculate from the adolescents in different age groups that they go through the acculturation and re-acculturation process during their teenage years.

This study attempted to look at the process of the changing identities of the new second generation by interviewing teenagers who are actually experiencing identity crisis at various levels. Although the final stage of their identities are not yet clear, as they are constantly changing, this method can show a more accurate picture of the actual process than interviewing adults and asking them to recall their past.

Another major contribution of this study is that it took into account the effect of ethnic media—media content that has been created in the language and culture of their cultural origins. Although the second generation were mostly bilingual in the sense that they speak and understand Korean, most of them found it hard to read and write in Korean. This language barrier did not interfere with the

consumption of Korean media, especially television programs. The consumption of Korean TV shows was a shared culture among family members and peer group, where they could communicate in their unique cultural ways. It was also where they could feel comfortable outside of the American mainstream society where they fit in well but also experience a sense of distance.

This study also has limitations. Those who participated in this study were all recruited from Korean-American churches, which means that those who do not attend church or some sort of community to bond with other bicultural adolescents may experience different processes in growing up and adjusting. Their sense of dual identity may not bloom until they enter society or go to college. So the subjects in the study are not representative of all Korean-American second generations.

This study aimed to look at the process of enculturation and re-acculturation of the second generation Korean Americans. Follow-up interviews with the respondents in the study with a time lag are imperative to analyze the long-term process.

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