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## **Biracial Identity Development: A Case of Black-Korean Biracial Individuals in Korea**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines two cases of Black-Korean biracial individuals and 4 Black-Korean biracial public figures who were playing influential roles in South Korea (Yoon Mi-Rae, Hines Ward, Insooni, and Moon Taejong). The purpose of this study was to understand how Black-Korean biracial individuals construct their identities, how they navigate various identity options, and how they understand experiences they have in South Korea that are significant to their identity development. This study raises a number of issues in the Korean context where the ideology of a “pureblood” Korean race still prevails, and biracial Koreans continue to face implications of racism and colorism.

**KEYWORDS:** biracial identity, mixed race, South Korea, multicultural, colorism

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“...identity...mixed race people kind of have, I guess three identities: What you see yourself as, what other people see you as, and what reality is.”

In 2006, Hines Ward, American football player, became a big sensation in Korea. This happened not only because he was named MVP in Super Bowl XL of that year, but also because he was half-Korean and half-Black (his mother is Korean and father Black). The media hype surrounding his visit to Korea was enormous, and, as a result, media exposure to biracial individuals in Korea increased, as well as media coverage on multicultural families. This phenomenon was quickly dubbed the “Hines Ward Syndrome” (Demick, 2006). Despite this recent media attention to biracial Koreans, individuals and families from mixed race backgrounds are not new identities in Korea. Biracial individuals and multicultural families have long been a part of the Korean society; however, they have largely been ignored or dismissed due to the dominant ideology of a “pureblood” Korean race.

Since the 2000s, the number of foreigners, international couples, and multicultural families in Korea has been rapidly growing (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2015). However, despite the growing media attention and government efforts in response to the changing demographics of the nation, racism and colorism both operate as “systems of discrimination” in the Korean society (Hunter, 2013, p.7). Hunter (2013) argues that there are at least two levels on which discrimination operates: the first system of discrimination is at the level of racial category, and the second system of discrimination is at the level of skin tone—darker skin or lighter skin. The construct of the “Korean race” and the ideology of pureblood Korean (*sunhyeoljuui*) are inextricably connected with the two systems of racism and colorism. For example, a light-skinned Vietnamese-Korean biracial individual may experience racism for not being pureblood Korean, despite her lighter complexion, while a darker-skinned Vietnamese-Korean biracial individual may experience racism and colorism simultaneously.

Racism and colorism continue to affect the lives of biracial Koreans in the South Korean education system. The Korean word *damunhwa*, which means “multiple cultures” or “multicultural,” has been used in recent decades to address non-mainstream Korean individuals, many of whom are racially mixed. Although the overall number of school-aged students has decreased, *damunhwa* (multicultural) students—students of multiethnic background—have increased by 20% from 2015 to 2016 (Jang, 2016). At the same time, however, 43.8% of these *damunhwa* students drop out of school while 69% of high school-aged *damunhwa* students do not receive any education (Hong, 2012). Results of a 2006 survey, conducted by the Government Youth Commission (GYC) of Korea (as cited in Sung, 2006), showed that 37.5% of half-Black half-Koreans, 17.6% of half-White half-Koreans, and 10.8% of half-Asian half-Koreans (also referred to as “*Kosians*”) identified themselves as foreigners to Korea. Moreover, to the question of whether or not they would want to immigrate to a country other than Korea, all half-Black half-Korean students answered that they would immigrate to another country other than Korea (as compared to 41.2% of half-White half-Koreans and 10.5% of half-Asian half-Koreans) (Go, 2006).

In a context where Korea’s mixed race population continues to grow, “multiculture” (as used in *damunwha*) does not fully address the specific implications that the construct of race has in the country. It is important to examine how biracial Koreans develop their identity, how racism and colorism in the Korean culture affects them, and how their lives and experiences may shape and transform what it means to be Korean in a global era. Relatively few studies have specifically examined biracial half-Black half-Korean individuals’ identity development and lives. In most cases, biracial identities of half-White half-Koreans are discussed, as a part of a larger conversation of mixed race Asian identities. Very little discussion has focused on what it means to be half-Black half-Korean, specifically in the Korean context. How do half-Black half-Korean individuals construct their identities, and how do they engage with their identities? What are some of the experiences they have in South Korea that are significant to their identity development? How do the narratives of half-Black half-

Koreans contribute to the dialogue of identity and citizenship in Korea? The current study addresses these questions.

### Framing Ideas and Literature

To understand the identity development and experiences of half-Black half-Korean individuals, three framing ideas derived from the literature help us navigate the terrain. First, biracial identity development models and theories allow us to understand how biracial identities are constructed and how biracial individuals interact with various ecological factors. Second, Korean history and culture with regards to race and racial formation, including the pureblood theory, provide a specific context in which biracial Korean identities are constructed. Finally, research on colorism would facilitate the analysis of skin color in Korean racial dynamics and its meaning in relation to biracial Black-Korean identities. This three-fold approach provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complexities of Black-Korean biracial Korean identities. Also, the experiences of the half-Black half-Korean individuals explored in this study can be understood using the three framing ideas from the literature.

### Biracial Identity Development

Jacobs (1992) and Poston (1990) were among the first scholars to recognize that biracial individuals may develop a racial identity based on the incorporation of different aspects of the race, ethnicity, and culture of both parents. However, both Jacobs and Poston approached biracial identity development as a sequential, predictable, and linear process with an ideal end stage. Later biracial identity development models did not follow a linear process, and suggest multiple racial identity options and outcomes. Scholars such as Root (2003), Renn (2012), and Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado (2009) took an ecological approach to racial identity development among the racially mixed population. Root (2003) used the term “border crossing” when she presented an ecological approach to exploring multiracial identity. In her four-position model of healthy biracial identity development, Root described how an individual resolves “other” status through one of four “border crossings.”

Renn (2012) is another scholar who suggested a nonlinear model of biracial identity development. Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's (2005) person-process-context-time (PPCT) model of human development, Renn (2012) focused on the ecological factors that influence multiracial identity development via an identification of five fluid and non-exclusive “identity patterns” (p. 67) among biracial and multiracial college students and found that students identified with one or more of the five patterns. In many cases, the situation or context dictated their identification. The term *situational identities* is used to describe a fluid identity in which an individual's racial identity is stable, but different elements

are more salient in some context than in others. Root (2003) and Renn (2012) not only echoed scholars of race like Jacobson (1998) in describing the “fluidity of race” (p.6) and race as a social construct, but also expanded the notion of race as a “floating signifier” (Hall & Jhally, 2002).

Some scholars (Pao, Wong, & Teuben-Rowe, 1997) problematized the term *biracial* because it implied “the mixing of two distinct, pure racial types, as if there were a strict biological basis for racial categorization” (p. 623). Scholars studying racially mixed individuals have not reached a consensus regarding the terminology or conventions we should use in addressing mixed heritage people (Jacobs, 1992; Poston, 1990; Renn, 2012; Root, 2003; Rockquemore et al., 2009). Throughout the study, I use the words “biracial,” “multiracial,” “racially mixed,” “multiple heritage,” and “mixed heritage” interchangeably, as do the authors of the studies cited. Also, to address biracial Korean individuals with one Korean parent and one Black parent, I use the terms “half-Black half-Korean” and “Black-Korean biracial” interchangeably.

### **Korean Racial Projects and “Koreanness”**

There are many countries founded upon the notion of a homogeneous nation, including Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and Germany. For Japan and Germany, the idea of a homogenous nation-state was used as a way to build an industrialized, powerful nation. Countries such as Korea or Vietnam used the ideology of homogenous national identity to recover national pride and reestablish the political authority of the once-colonized country (Jager, 2003). In Korea, the ideology of a homogenous, monoracial Korean race—*sunhyeoljuui* (pureblood theory)—appeared specifically after the Japanese colonization of the nation as a *racial project*. As Omi and Winant (2015) suggested, racial formation is a process of historically situated *projects* in which the meaning and dynamics of race are interpreted, represented, or explained in language, thought, policies, popular discourse, and interaction within the greater social structure. During the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945), the Japanese launched a campaign to persuade Koreans that they were of the same racial stock as the Japanese themselves (Myers, 2010). To fight against the colonialist policies of Japan, Korean nationalists emphasized *gukhon* (the spirit of the nation) and strongly contended the concept of *Hanminjok* (the Korean race) which asserted that the Korean nation was based on a single, superior bloodline (Schumid, 2007). After gaining independence from Japan in 1945, and after the 1950-53 Korean War, a new racial project emerged, as there were many orphans and biracial Koreans born to Korean women and fathered by American soldiers. The new racial project now included skin color and physical features as determinants of a “pure” Korean race.

Government policies and laws are a type of Korean racial project that helps consolidate the category of people classified as “Korean.” Prior to 2011, biracial Korean men in Korea were banned from serving in the South Korean

military, although mandatory military service was required of all Korean male citizens. The Korean military excluded all biracial Korean men from active duty because they believed that Koreans with non-Asian features had a distinct physical appearance compared to their monoracial Korean counterparts. The law was set in place by the Korean government to “protect” biracial Koreans, as it was believed that the biracial Korean soldiers would experience “culture shock” and be unable to adjust to the difficulties of military life due to challenges that could come with looking different from the “full-blooded” Korean men (Lee, 2010). It was only in January 2011 that the South Korean government mandated that all able-bodied South Korean men, regardless of their skin color or ethnic background, would be required to submit for active duty.

Korean racial projects also include race-based media representations, imagery, stereotypes, and art that are employed in the process of racial formation. With the change in demographics in the nation, there has been an increasing representation and presence of foreigners and “racial others” in media and popular culture (Ahn, 2015, p. 938). Despite growing racial diversity in Korean mass media, the representation of biracial Koreans is mostly limited to those who are half-White half-Korean. Biracial Koreans with lighter skin tones and with Western appearances and body types are preferred over mixed Koreans who are of Southeast Asian or Black ancestry with darker skin tones. In fact, the advertising strategy used for a Kpop girl group called Chocolat when they debuted was to emphasize that they were the “nation’s first White-Korean biracial group” (Park, 2011).

In light of Korean racial dynamics, *Koreanness* may be understood as a privilege and ideology that is contingent upon various historical, social, and cultural influences, much like Whiteness in the United States. Whiteness is a socially constructed identity and an ideology created for distribution of wealth, power, prestige, and opportunity, which has cash value and can be possessed as property (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, 2009). Similarly, Koreanness—being of Korean heritage and having Korean skin color, physique, phenotype, and physical features—started gaining material as well as social and cultural value, which is translated to racial privilege, racial hierarchy, practices of elitism, and exclusivity. Much as how “the interactive and dynamic duality of *whiteness* and ‘race’ in American society” exists, Koreanness operates simultaneously with the structuration of Korean “race” in the Korean society. Race and Koreanness continue to operate as basic features of social organization within the Korean culture.

### **Skin Color and Colorism in Korean Culture**

Deeply linked with the concept of “Korean race” is the notion of skin color. The work of scholars in colorism studies (Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Burke, 2008; Glenn, 2009; Hall, 2005; Hunter, 2007, 2013) is useful in interpreting the importance of skin color in the Korean cultural context. *Colorism* is defined as the

“allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one’s skin” (Burke, 2008, p. 17) and refers to the system of discrimination that people experience differently based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone and other external traits (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992). In Korea, the practices of colorism—favoring lighter skinned Koreans over darker skinned Koreans—impact various aspects of life. Furthermore, the interlocking systems of racism and colorism, along with education, income, and physical attributes such as hair texture, eye color, and facial features, also affect perceptions of who is considered dark or light skinned (Hunter, 2005).

Although the current culture of colorism is deeply linked with European colonialism, imperialism, and globalization, a form of colorism existed in Korea prior to modern Western contact. Historically, Koreans perceived lighter, whiter skin to be more beautiful. “Porcelain-white jade-like skin” was used as a metaphor in Korea to describe lighter, pale skin tones. Koreans would also grind rice into powder and use it to wash their faces or apply it on their faces. In contemporary Korea, pale skin complexions and “Caucasian features” are also desirable, with one out of five Korean women getting plastic surgery at some point in her life (Elliott, 2014). Another representative practice of colorism can be seen in the cosmetics market for skin-whitening products and services. This is a global phenomenon not only in Korea, but also in India, China, Japan, Malaysia, and many other Asian countries. According to the World Health Organization (2011), 40% of women in China, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Korea have admitted using skin lightening products.

Among marriages between Koreans and foreign spouses, there has been a tendency for Koreans to marry people of Asian descent, who are of lighter skin tone. The non-Korean, foreign spouses in interracial marriages are mainly from China, followed by Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines (Lee, S. M., 2015). When marrying non-Korean partners, Koreans choose to marry those with similar skin color and physical features. Skin color is directly related to acceptance within the Korean society and to the opportunities that are available not only for foreign spouses, but also for biracial children. In addition, Koreans are also aware that it is very “economical” to be whiter, as lighter-complexioned persons hold higher paying jobs. As Glenn (2009) points out, skin color is linked to social mobility as individuals, and groups are ordered and compete in terms of access and ability to use symbolic capital in a status paradigm. Thus, even when considering interracial marriages, the “racial pyramid” exists for Korean.

## **Methodology**

The data for this study were collected using three major sources: document analysis, a focus group interview of two half-Black half-Korean individuals, and publications about four half-Black half-Korean public figures in Korea (Yoon Mi-Rae, Hines Ward, Insooni, and Moon Taejong). According to Potter (1996), document examination of research studies includes materials such

as letters, memos, notes, diaries, articles, books, manuscripts, e-mails, online discussions, and so forth. I used news articles, statistics of the Korean government, documents of Korean community organizations, and television and online media in investigating information.

In order to explore the development of biracial identity and elaborate on common themes described in biracial identity theories (Jacobs, 1992; Poston, 1990; Root, 2003; Renn, 2012), qualitative research methodologies were applied. The strength of qualitative methodology is that it is flexible and more likely to allow for the development and testing of some theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative methodologies allow the researcher to develop hypotheses for future studies from a contextual understanding of the group and its norms (Root, 2003). The Black-Korean biracial population is relatively small, so qualitative inquiry was appropriate; qualitative inquiry generally incorporates relatively small samples selected purposefully to help ensure inclusive information-rich cases.

This study was conducted in Seoul, the capital city of Korea, and the vicinity. There are various reasons I chose Seoul for this study on biracial Korean individuals. Seoul is the largest metropolitan city in the country, with about 20% of the nation's population (Korean Ministry of Security and Public Administration, 2014). Also, historically, most of the US military posts were in Seoul and the vicinity, with the largest foreign population and biracial Korean population in the nation (Eum, 2014). However, it was still difficult to locate Black-Korean biracial individuals for my study. This is because the population of biracial Koreans who are half-Black, half-Korean is smaller than any other group of multiracial Korean individuals. Also, many half-Black, half-Korean individuals do not remain in Korea due to discrimination they face (Go, 2006), and the multicultural centers or organizations refused permission for me to meet biracials. After two months of searching for participants, I contacted an organization for expatriates in Seoul, Korea, where I met the participants of my study. I explained my study to two Black-Korean biracial individuals, and we kept in touch for a month after our initial meeting. After exchanging emails, I set up an interview with both participants. One participant was in his late twenties and one participant in her thirties. Both were working as English teachers in Seoul.

The participants were interviewed once, together in a group setting. The interview session lasted approximately one hour. The participants were informed as to the purpose of the study and to the interviews before it began. The interview was open-ended and semi-structured. The participants were allowed to talk freely in response to various questions. The interview was designed around the following issues: (a) their thoughts about the identity of biracial Korean individuals; (b) their personal identity development process and journey; (c) experiences and memories as biracial Black-White individuals in Korea and in the US; and (d) ways in which they are supporting the identity empowerment journey other biracial Korean students. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Both names of the participants used in the analysis of data are pseudonyms. The results were analyzed to determine themes and

commonalities that emerged from the interviews. The focus group interview of the two participants accomplished a number of goals. Focus groups are used to generate information on collective views and the meaning that lies behind those views. Focus groups are also useful in generating a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs (Morgan, 1998). Focus groups are also used to clarify, extend, qualify, or challenge data collected through other methods (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). This focus group interview was an opportunity to watch how biracial individuals interacted when asked to discuss their identity development (Renn, 2012), and they helped verify data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Third, I focused on four half-Black, half-Korean public figures in the media who were playing an influential role in the country. To examine half-Black, half-Korean biracial public figures, I referred to autobiographies, interviews, news articles, excerpts, and talks from various media. The public figures examined included four biracial individuals of a Black father and Korean mother. Hines Ward and Insooni were born in Korea, and Yoon Mi-Rae and Moon Taejong were born in the United States. Hines Ward, an American football player, spent the majority of his life outside of Korea and has built his career in the United States. On the other hand, Moon Taejong, a Korean basketball player, was born in the United States but became a naturalized citizen in Korea in 2011. The other two individuals, Insooni and Yoon Mi-Rae, both music artists, have spent most of their lives in Korea and have gained recognition in their careers as well.

### **Navigating Black-Korean Biracial Identity Options**

My data showed that the Black-Korean individuals of the study constructed their identities by straddling boundaries of various identity categories, self-identifying as being monoracial, belonging to more than one group, or moving among identity options. Some of the Black-Korean public figures explored in this study felt a need to belong with one racial group and experienced times when they felt shame or self-hatred for being racially mixed. This is consistent with Root's (2003) theory that biracial individuals choose identity options such as *Identification with a single racial group* and *Identification with both racial groups*. Although singer Insooni was born and raised in Korea, she often felt that she straddled between identifying as Korean, the racial group with which she identified more, and identifying as Black, the racial group to which the Korean society assigned her. She wrote, "I'm 99 percent Korean, but the other 1 percent has always haunted me" (Han, 2013). Hines Ward, born in South Korea but grew up in the United States, described how it was difficult for him to embrace and identify with his Korean heritage when he was younger:

To me, it was tough. It was never like the upbringing my friends had. At first, I was embarrassed that I had a Korean mom... It was tough when my mom spoke broken English to my friends and their parents and people

couldn't understand what she was saying or she couldn't understand what they were saying (Han, 2014).

Likewise, Moon Taejong, who grew up in North Carolina, expressed that North Carolina was “not the best place to live for people like me [racially mixed individuals]” and people would watch his family like “why is a Black guy married to an Asian woman?” (Kim, 2015). As both Moon and Ward experienced, among several salient factors contributed to biracial individuals' choice of group categorization, *status factors* (e.g., group status of parents' ethnic background, demographics of home neighborhood, and ethnicity and influence of peer group) influenced their decision (Hall, as cited in Poston, 1990, p. 153).

Zoe, who grew up in the United States but moved to Korea in her thirties, shared that she had limited identity options to choose from, as she tried to identify with either one racial group or another. In terms of identity growth, she reflected on times where she wished she were a monoracial person, and did not have both sides because “it seemed very burdensome.” She described her view on the identity development of biracial individuals: “Mixed race people kind of have, I guess three identities. What you see yourself as, what other people see you as, and what reality is.” Although Zoe was born in Uijeongbu, Korea, she had not experienced visiting or living in Korea and many times had to “prove” that she was part-Korean. To resolve the discrepancies between how she saw herself and how others saw her and her journey of claiming her racial belonging, Zoe decided to move to Korea as an English teacher when she was 31 years old:

For me, I came here [Korea] three years ago to find out what it was I was not. Because apparently, I'm not Korean enough. Or not Black enough. So I was like well, you know, let me go to Korea and see what I'm not.

Like Zoe, the singer Yoon Mi-rae, whose father was an African American soldier, and whose mother was Korean, said she “experienced discrimination from both sides” in the United States and South Korea. She confessed, “In the US, I wasn't Black enough. In Korea, they called me ‘Yankee’ (John, 2015). Many mixed race individuals experience *hazing*—a process to prove themselves as full members of a racial/ethnic group and an authentic insider (Root, 1998). For those with an ambiguous physical appearance or phenotype that claims a monoracial membership, hazing “requires submission or negation of self and the ego, risking emotionally cruel rejection” (Root, 1998, p. 243). In her journey toward finding belonging in a racial group, Zoe noted that she continuously dealt with her racially ambiguous appearance as well as being acknowledged and accepted by others:

Sometimes I'm not even associated with being Black or Filipino. People ask me if I am from Samoa or part-Japanese? They're not sure where to place me.... When you challenge them—you being mixed—they don't know what to do with you.

Zoe's experiences are consistent with studies that show that biracial individuals face questions of “What are you” or “What am I” when they decide to define themselves (Collins, 2000). Like Zoe, the Black-Korean individuals of this study

mentioned that their skin color affected how others identified them. Singer Yoon Mi-Rae expressed that her first label asked her to hide her father's skin color, and the stylists would try to make her look "more Korean" due to her darker skin complexion (John, 2015). She wrote in one of her songs, "Black Happiness":

I washed my face more than once every day, I melted the white sofa with my tears, I always resented my dark skin secretly...my skin color was dark brown.... They begged me to put on a mask of white makeup over my face and hide (Yoon, 2007).

Liam, who was in his late twenties and also moved to Korea to work as an English teacher, explained that Koreans would immediately identify him as a non-Korean because of his darker skin color and physical appearance. He said he asserted his Korean identity more in Korea so that Koreans would acknowledge his Koreanness:

In America, I'd say I'm Korean and African-American. I say both. But in Korea, I usually say I'm just Korean. Just because I know that if I say I'm Korean-African American, most Koreans will say, "Okay, you're American".... I shouldn't have to say, "I'm Korean 100 percent" to be able to be treated like a regular person. But if I start saying I'm Korean *and* African American, they start treating like a foreigner, or they start treating me in a different way, and that's really uncomfortable for me.

Because the Korean language is another essential factor in constructing Koreanness, Liam decided to learn the Korean language to prove his Korean heritage and to be accepted from Koreans. This is consistent with Root's (1998) findings that showed that biracial individuals felt a need to "prove their insider status" (p.242), while experiencing racial discrimination from the majority group. For many biracial individuals, knowledge of languages other than English (if any) and cultural knowledge are important salient factors that contribute to biracial individuals decision-making process of choosing a group with which to identify (Hall, 2005).

### **Negotiating Black-Korean Biracial Identities in Korea**

Singer Yoon Mi-Rae, who was born in Texas and moved to Korea as a child, faced discrimination from a young age because of her mixed heritage. Although she started attending school in the South Korean education system, she dropped out of school at the age of 15 to later take the high school equivalency exam. Yoon reflected on her childhood experiences growing up in Korea as follows:

When I came to Korea as a young girl, I had no friends and couldn't speak Korean....Kids of my age only bullied me. They called me "negro" and shouted, "Yankee, go home" at me. They told me to go back to my country with a ticket they were going to buy for me (The Chosun Ilbo, 2007).

Yoon recalled, “In primary and middle school, there wasn’t a day when I wasn’t reminded I was only half Korean. People stared at me. It was really hard” (John, 2015). Like Yoon, biracial Korean students who are in the South Korean education system face various challenges. As reported by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (as cited in Sung, 2006), more than 70% of biracial Korean students have been teased during their school years for their skin color, and over 60% have experienced bullying in the school. Aside from discrimination from peers, teachers, and staff, biracial Korean students also face challenges with developing their identities and building positive self-esteem.

However, Korea has recently seen some changes toward the acceptance of biracial individuals due to globalization and, especially, due to the Hines Ward phenomenon. In 2010, Moon, who played basketball at the University of Richmond, headed to Korea to apply for the ethnic Korean draft held by the Korean Basketball League. This ethnic Korean draft allowed “foreign players with Korean ties” not to be considered as foreign players (Liebsch, 2011). Moon said he wanted to use his career to learn the culture in Korea, which he missed when he was young. He also expressed that he had heard about more discrimination than he had experienced.

At the same time, however, Zoe stated that despite the heavy media coverage on biracial individuals in Korea after the “Hines Ward syndrome,” it did not fundamentally reform the institutional and cultural racism that is deeply embedded in Korea. The participants shared their frustrations in Korea as they tried to be socially accepted as Korean. Zoe said:

That’s the thing about being mixed race, or multiracial is that, no matter if I identify myself as a Black and Korean woman, the world here, in Korea, will see me as American. Period....I should have a lot more rights than some *gyopos* [ethnic Koreans], who can’t speak the language and don’t know anything about the culture. They weren’t even born here, but because they “look” Korean, they’re accepted as Korean.

In response to my question about how biracial Koreans are socially accepted in Korea, Liam said that a large population of biracial Koreans, who are valuable to the society, went unnoticed. He expressed that if Koreans would accept those who are not “full-blooded” Koreans and give opportunities to them, Korea would have more multiracial people who are in professional fields other than just in music or sports. As Bell (1980) argued in his Interest Convergence theory, most half-Black half-Koreans who have made their careers in South Korea are currently limited to those who are in fields that result from the self-interest of elite Koreans rather than a desire to help biracial Koreans (i.e., Yoon Mi-Rae and Insooni contributing to the South Korean entertainment industry; Moon Taejong having participated in the FIBA Asia Championship games representing South Korea). For this reason, after being self-empowered with their own biracial identities, the two English teachers of my study and the four public figures have contributed to challenging the existing social systems and guide other biracial Koreans who are yet exploring their biracial identities, especially biracial Korean students. Zoe and Liam, along with other expat English teachers in the country,

volunteered to teach non-mainstream Koreans who are racially mixed. They believed that there is potential in the “untapped resources” that Korea has and that providing equal opportunity, education, and access to racially mixed Koreans would bring a positive change not only to the biracial individuals but to the country as a whole.

Believing in the importance of education, Insooni established Haemill School, a private alternative boarding school for multicultural students in Gangwon Province of Korea in 2013. The Korean word *Haemill* means “the sky that has cleared up after the rain,” and Haemill School focuses on educating non-mainstream, multicultural students and young immigrant students. Haemill School, which is directly financed by Insooni and various charitable organizations, provides middle school education and accepts students who have graduated elementary school, either by being home-schooled or by attending alternative schools. Haemill School has recently started providing free education by lifting financial burdens of tuition, meals, and boarding from students and families (Lee, S. H., 2015).

Hines Ward started the Hines Ward Helping Hands Foundation in Pittsburgh, PA, which aims to improve literacy among inner-city children. In Korea, the Helping Hands Foundation works through The Beautiful Foundation, which assists and equips biracial Korean children to gain literacy and to succeed in life. Ward’s goal was to provide resources and programs that would enhance biracial Korean children’s lives. Ward shared that he was inspired by his trip to Korea when he met with 70 to 100 biracial Korean children and heard their stories of discrimination (Kuhn, 2011). Meanwhile, singer Yoon Mi-Rae continues to serve as an ambassador for multicultural youth and expresses her experiences through her music (Kim, 2013). The six Black-Korean biracial individuals in the study and their efforts to provide opportunities and resources for underprivileged, racially mixed Koreans in Korea reflect the work of Collins (2000) who emphasized the importance of empowerment and social justice and argued that empowerment requires transforming unjust social institutions from one generation to the next.

As Root (2003) summarized, there are a number of limitations relevant to research on multiracial people, including the limited range of the number of demographic variables, such as socioeconomic status and age. The findings in the present study have several of these limitations. The sample population of Black-Korean biracial Koreans does not represent the whole population. The two participants who were interviewed as a group moved to Korea as adults but had spent most of their lives in the United States or other countries. Two of the four public Black-Korean biracial public figures also had spent the majority of their lives in the United States or other countries. There were other variables like the differences in regions and communities in which the individuals had lived. Also, all the Black-Korean biracial individuals who were explored in this study were successful and socially accepted in Korea as athletes, musicians, or teachers. Furthermore, each individual may claim different identities at the present stage. Hence the biracial identity development may vary depending on different age

groups, localities, education levels, and social status, which is yet to be researched.

## Conclusion

In Korea, the word *damunhwa* means multiple cultures or multicultural. It is a term that has been used in recent decades to describe the growing diversity—specifically racial diversity—of the population. The narrow use of the term has been applied to individuals who are biracial, or racially mixed, born of one foreign-born parent and one Korean parent. Although race and culture are two different social constructs that are not necessarily exclusive, it is necessary to distinguish these two terms in the Korean context in order to identify discrimination based on race and skin color and to make changes necessary towards social justice. Exploring biracial identity development of racially mixed Koreans uncovers the natural and “common sense” (Omi & Winant, 2015) implications of the social construct of race in the Korean context and further challenges the expectations that are guided by racial formation.

This study focused on identifying essential themes of biracial identity development of Black-Korean biracial individuals. Many common issues and themes that have been described in biracial identity development theories paralleled the themes that were found in the study. First and foremost, the present research helps understand the biracial identity development of half-Black half-Korean individuals in the Korean context. This study engenders useful implications about the South Korean education system, where biracial Korean students continue to drop out of the school system. Educators need to create an inclusive learning environment that helps not only racially mixed Koreans but *all* Korean students become aware of the racial dynamics of Korea, learn about the power structure and institutionalized discrimination interwoven in the Korean society, and develop and explore their identities. Citizenship education, along with dialogue and discussion about what it means to be Korean, is needed within the South Korean education system. Also, while the present study mainly focused on the social construct of race as an analytical lens, future studies may focus on how race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, and other social constructs interplay in biracial identity development. Additionally, only two out of six individuals explored in this study spent a majority of their lives in Korea, leaving room for further research on the experiences of half-Black, half-Korean individuals, especially the younger generation, who were born and raised in Korea. Considering that biracial Koreans with one Korean parent and one Black parent, who is not necessarily of African American descent, are growing in Korea, research would be welcome on these new half-Korean half-Black biracials.

The population of Korea is becoming increasingly diverse, both ethnically and racially. Korea is witnessing a growth of foreigners and racially mixed Koreans in the country. It is crucial to acknowledge that biracial Koreans like the

participants in this study have the lived experience of what it means to navigate and negotiate biracial identities. With their lived experience, biracial Koreans may help other Koreans—including other racially mixed Koreans—further understand the racial dynamics and culture of power in Korea and help Koreans embrace the diversity that all Koreans bring. The insights gained from this study may expand the current biracial identity paradigms and add to the literature on multiracial Korean identities.

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