

Survey of Attendees of the 2010 International Korean Adoptee Associations Gathering of Korean Adoptees, August 4, 2010, Seoul, South Korea

An ICAA Report

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Abstract

This report summarizes the results of a survey of 179 adult Korean adoptees from 11 adoptive nations who attended the 2010 Gathering of Korean Adoptees in Seoul. In 1999, all of the roughly 400 Korean adoptees attending the “Gathering” conference were invited to complete a survey about their adoptee experience, and 167 responded. Freundlich and Lieberthal compiled the results of these surveys in “The Gathering of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees: Adoptees’ Perceptions of International Adoption.” The 2010 survey population approximately represented worldwide adult Korean adoptees in its distribution across adoptive nations and in terms of gender. Participants ranged from 19 to 59 years of age and their average age was 31. Participants reported moderate exposure to Korean heritage experiences while growing up. The survey population was unusual in its tendency to be highly educated and single, as well as in their extremely high rate of birth family search and reunion. Self-selection of the survey population, most of whom had made long international journeys to attend the conference where they were surveyed, may have contributed to these results. An initial survey and report completed at the first Gathering of Korean Adoptees in 1999 provides some basis for comparison, though the survey instruments used were not the same.

Introduction

This report, commissioned by leadership of the International Korean Adoptee Associations (ICAA), summarizes a survey of adult Korean adoptee attendees of the Gathering of Korean Adoptees that took place in Seoul in August 2010. The purpose of the survey was to gain basic information about adult Korean adoptees for general research purposes, and as an aid to planning future ICAA Gatherings. Survey topics included demographics (gender, sexuality, country of residence, country of adoption, current age and age at adoption) life experiences (educational attainment, profession, adoptive family makeup, current family makeup, exposure to Korean heritage, Korean language fluency), pre-adoption experiences (residence prior to adoption, reason for separation from birth family), ethnic identity (current and past identity, experiences of discrimination), and post-adoption service interests (experience living in Korea, interest in Korean permanent residency and citizenship, search and reunion experiences, interest in specific post-adoption services).

This report follows, but does not replicate, a survey and report on Korean adoptees at the first Gathering of Korean Adoptees, which took place in Washington, D.C. in 1999.

History of the Gatherings and Previous Gathering Survey

Our survey was conducted at an International Association of Korean Adoptees Gathering, the fifth of its kind—an international conference by, for and about adult Korean adoptees and their experiences. The first of these gatherings (all referred to in Korean adoptee parlance simply as “The Gatherings”) took place in 1999 in Washington, D.C., the second two years later in Oslo, Norway, and the third and fourth Gatherings were in Seoul, South Korea in 2004 and 2007. The survey presented here is the second such survey of adult Korean adoptees to be performed at a Gathering. The first was at the first Gathering in 1999.

In 1999, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, in collaboration with Holt International Children’s Services, collected surveys from those attending The Gathering of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees. Their report, authored by Madelyn Freundlich and Joy Kim Lieberthal, chronicled the lives of 167 adult Korean adoptees representing a majority of U.S. states and a handful of European countries.¹ Though the 1999 and 2010 surveys have several differences, we compared our results with those of 1999 when possible. Among its many findings, the 1999 report concluded that more attention should be directed at strengthening post-adoption services for adult Korean adoptees through activities facilitated by international adult Korean adoptee organizations, and that education around experiences of discrimination should be improved for adoptive parents and other Korean adoptees in need of support.

Methods

The questions used in the 2010 survey instrument were developed by Kim Park Nelson and Kimberly Langrehr in consultation with several other Korean adoption scholars and IKAA leadership. Results of the 1999 survey were also considered in developing the 2010 survey instrument. The primary purpose was to collect data that would be useful for comparison with previously collected data, the 1999 Gathering survey in particular. However, a secondary goal was to collect information that would be useful for IKAA in assessing and understanding the needs of current and future Gathering participants. There were also practical considerations: in order to encourage participation in the survey, the survey tool was designed with an approximate 10 minute completion time with the understanding that wide participation in a brief survey was preferable to a more detailed survey with fewer participants. The survey questions covered basic demographics (age, gender, country of adoption, relationship and employment status), family demographics (adoptive family makeup as well as adoptee family makeup) and adoption-related information such as

¹ Freundlich, Madelyn and Lieberthal, Joy Kim. The Gathering of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees: Adoptees’ Perceptions of International Adoption [Paper published online]. Adoption Institute, 2000. Accessed 16 November 2002. Available from <http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/proed/korfindings.html>.

placement before adoption, age at adoption, exposure to Korean heritage, experiences with discrimination, birth search and reunion, and use of adoption-related services. IKAA approved the survey instrument (see Appendix 1) for use during the 2010 Gathering.

The purpose of conducting the survey in person at the 2010 Gathering was to maximize participation. One of the central programs at the last several Gatherings has been the so-called “age breakout sessions” during which participants are separated into age cohorts for facilitated discussions about their adoption experiences. These sessions have been historically well attended, and on that basis were selected as sites to recruit survey participants. Group facilitators were instructed to introduce the surveys as optional, but to hand out the survey instruments and allow time for participants to fill them out. Participants were also informed that they were free to respond to as much or as little of the survey as they chose. In 1999, these age breakout sessions were used as de-facto focus groups that supplied qualitative data for the 1999 Gathering report; since 2004 the Gathering has been under the sole control of adoptee leadership and the culture of the Gatherings has changed to privilege and protect adoptee attendees. Age breakout session conversations are now considered private and confidential, so research observation is not permitted. Therefore, while the breakout sessions still provided the logistical basis for data collection, survey activity was kept strictly separate from session discussion. Of the 415 adoptees who attended the 2010 Gathering, 179 participated in the survey.

After survey completion, IKAA volunteers entered data into spreadsheets for data analysis. All survey data was initially coded and entered in Excel but later exported to SPSS-19 for more in-depth analysis. The majority of analyses were descriptive in nature based on the demographic information collected. Several cross-tabulations were also conducted in order to compare the frequency of responses according to certain variables of interest.

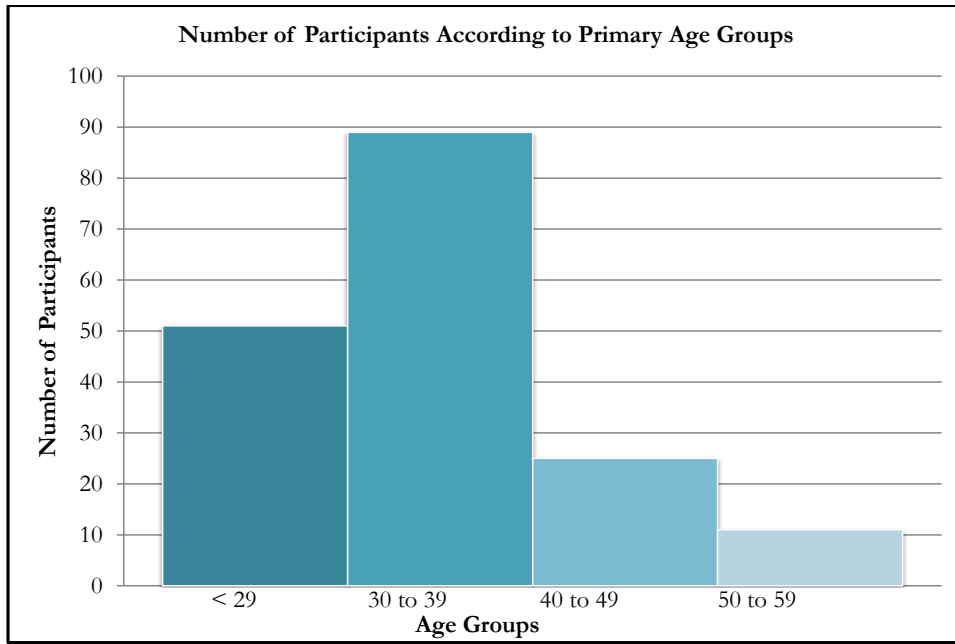
Results

Demographic Data

Age

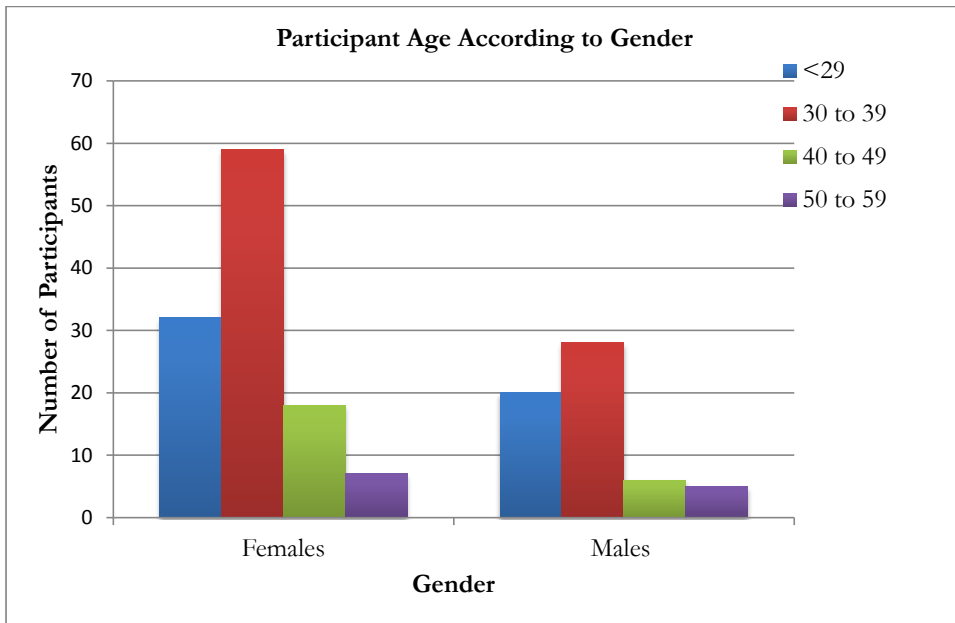
The range in age among survey participants was 19 to 59. The lower age range was restricted by age limits (18) set by IKAA for conference registration, as the conference programming was intended for adult adoptees only. The mean age of those surveyed was 34 years, slightly older than the age of the 1999 survey respondents (31 years).² The 175 participating adoptees were born between 1951 and 1991 and adopted between birth and 12 years of age. Over half of those surveyed were in their thirties, and this age group was clearly over-represented, considering that it constitutes only about 8% of Korean adoptees worldwide. Adoptees between 20 and 29 years of age constitute almost 43% of the worldwide Korean adoptee population, but only 29% of the survey participant population. It is possible that the concentration of adoptee attendees in their thirties is also a result of the expense connected to attending a conference in Korea; it is likely that adoptees in their thirties would be better able to afford such an experience than younger adoptees.

² Freundlich and Lieberthal, *op. cit.*



Gender

Two-thirds (118 individuals) of survey participants were women, outnumbering male participants (59 individuals) two to one.

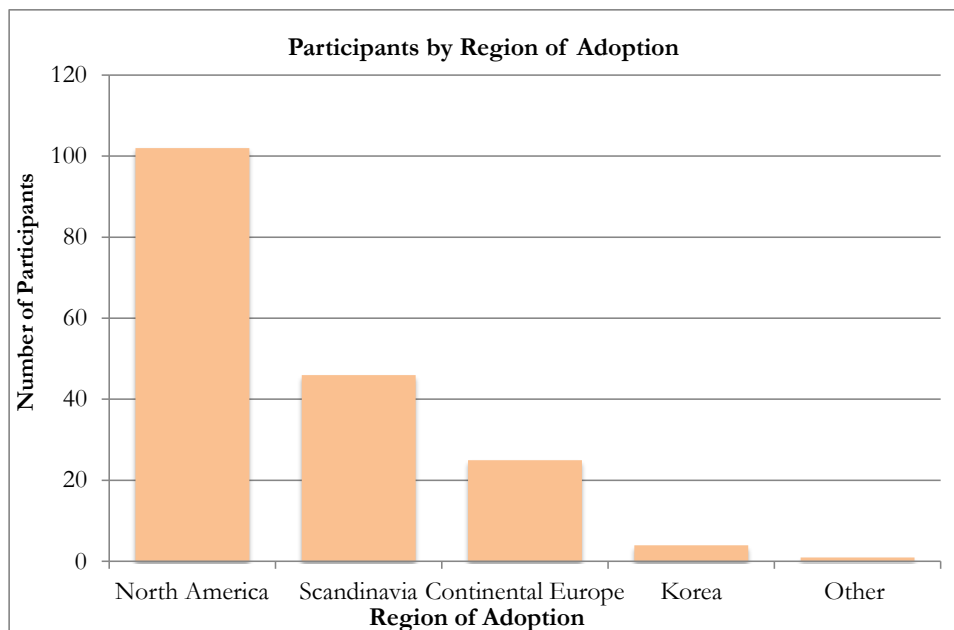


For all the age groups represented, this is fairly consistent with the gender breakdown of overseas adopted Koreans. From 1958 until the mid-1980s, approximately 70% of

Korean adoptees were female.³ As compared to the 1999 survey, there were fewer female participants; in 1999 82% of survey participants were women.⁴

Country of Adoption

Historically, sixteen nations have participated in an adoption program with South Korea that resulted in over 100 adoptions (USA, France, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Australia, Germany, Canada, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Italy, New Zealand, Japan, and domestic adoption within South Korea). Of these, eleven were represented at the 2010 Gathering. Over half (56%, n = 99) were adopted in the United States. Of the remainder, almost 26% (n=46) were adopted into Scandinavia (Sweden, Denmark, and Norway), and 14% (n=25) were adopted into the rest of Europe (France, Italy, the UK, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Belgium). Four individuals were adopted domestically in South Korea and one person was adopted to Australia. The 2010 Gathering in Korea was clearly a much more international event than the 1999 Gathering, which took place in the U.S. and at which 96% of participants were American.⁵

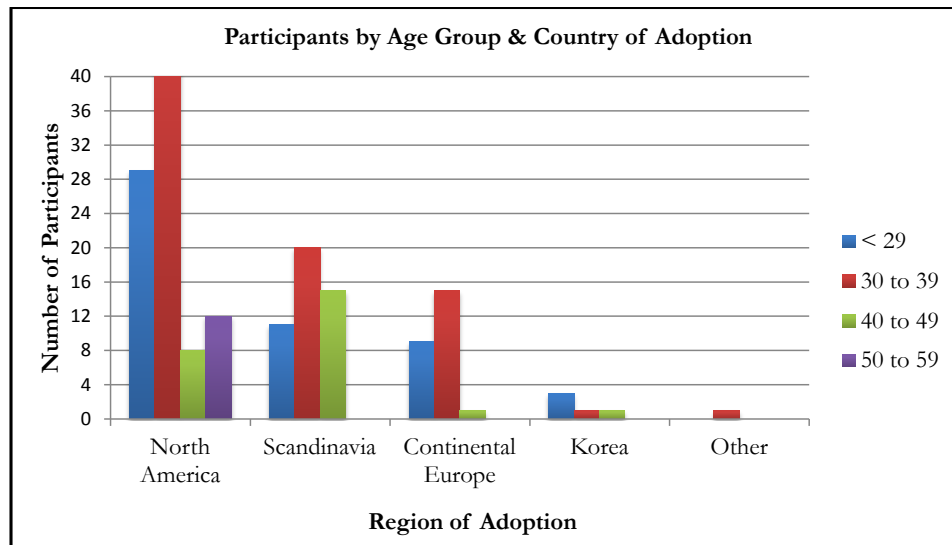


Though specific-year data were not available for all years, the South Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare reports that 90% of all adoptions between 1958 and 1969 were to the United States, with 9% to Scandinavian nations and 1% to Continental Europe. This roughly corresponds to adoptees aged 42 to 52, though some adoptees (especially during this period) were not adopted in the year of their birth. For adoptees ages 30 to 41, 55% went to North America (with the majority adopted in the United States), 21% went to

³ Hübinette, Tobias. "Comforting an Orphaned Nation: Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture." Ph.D. Dissertation, Stockholm University, 2005. Page 265, from South Korea Ministry of Health and Welfare.

⁴ Freundlich and Lieberthal, *op. cit.*

⁵ *Ibid.*



Scandinavia, and 20% went to Continental Europe. For those under age 29, 71% were adopted to North America, 12% went to Scandinavia and 13% went to Continental Europe.⁶

Scandinavian adoptees were slightly overrepresented among the survey participants at 26%, even though Scandinavian adoptees constitute only 16% of Korean adult adoptees worldwide. Adoptees from other European countries were fairly represented in the survey at 14% compared to 15% of adult Korean adoptees worldwide. American adoptees were slightly underrepresented in the survey (56% of respondents vs. 64% of the worldwide adult Korean adoptee population).

Of special note is the number of attendees residing in Korea. These are adoptees who were adopted into Western nations, but have returned to Korea to live. It is estimated that this population numbers a few hundred at most. Though this is a very small proportion (perhaps one tenth of one percent) of the worldwide Korean adoptee population, they constituted 8% of survey participants, signaling the tendency for local residents to attend adoptee-focused events in high numbers.

Educational Attainment

Of the 179 survey respondents, 168 responded to a question about their highest educational attainment. In the general population, college/university undergraduate degree attainment in the U.S. is about 21% for those over age 18.⁷ Attainment of university degree in Europe varies from nation to nation (Belgium, 16%; Denmark, 28%; France, 16%; Italy, 14%; the Netherlands, 29%; Norway, 34%; Sweden, 23%; Switzerland, 23% and the UK, 24%),⁸ but is generally lower than university degree attainment for Gathering survey respondents, which was over 50%.

⁶ "Number of International Adoptions from Korea, by Decade, Country, 1958-2005." *International Korean Adoptee Resource Book*, ed. Jeannie Hong, Overseas Korea Foundation, 2006, Page 612. South Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare.

⁷ U.S. Census, "Educational Attainment." <http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/data/cps/2012/tables.html>. Accessed 20 May 2013.

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*. "Table 421: Percentage of the population 25 to 64 who attained selected levels of postsecondary education, by age group and country, 2001 and 2008." Page 614. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED518987.pdf>. Accessed 20 May 2013.

Korean adoptee respondents at the ICAA 2010 Gathering also had exceptionally high post-graduate educational attainment compared to national norms in North America and Europe. While master's and/or professional degree attainment in the U.S. in 2009 was about 8%,⁹ the percentage of master's and/or professional degree attainment in this sample was over five times that, 41.4% (of the 169 of 179 survey participants who responded to education questions). Doctoral degree attainment for this group was 2.4%, very consistent with overall American doctoral degree attainment.

A number of factors could contribute to the unusually high post-graduate degree attainment in this group. It is likely that Gathering attendees are more affluent than the general population of adoptees: the majority of the survey population had traveled from outside Asia to attend the Gathering at considerable expense and most attendees would have to take time away from work to be there. The attainment of professional or master's degrees could well be an indicator of higher income and/or socioeconomic status. In addition, it is possible that adoptees are raised in families that are more affluent than average, and that Korean adoptees have, in general, inherited higher than average class positions as a result. This theory is supported somewhat by the higher-than-average educational degree attainment within the 1999 survey population (42% bachelor, 24% graduate).¹⁰ In addition, the inclusion of a scholarly symposium in the 2010 Gathering program, the Second International Symposium on Korean Adoption Studies, may have increased the number of highly educated individuals attending the conference, and therefore available to participate in the survey.

Family Demographics

Adoptee Relationships and Family

Participants were asked if they were married or in a cohabiting relationship, in a non-cohabiting relationship, or single. Half of the respondents were in primary relationships (dating, cohabiting or married). Compared to U.S. Census data, survey participants in all four age groups surveyed were less likely to be involved in a primary relationship.¹¹ OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) data based on a 2010 Gallup poll which calculated marriage and cohabitation suggests that the U.S. and most of the European nations represented in our survey population have similar proportions

⁹ U.S. Census, "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2009 – Detailed Tables" <http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/data/cps/2009/tables.html>. Accessed 10 March 2011.

¹⁰ Freundlich and Lieberthal, *op. cit.*

¹¹ In 2012, the American marriage rate was 6.8%; European marriage rates are lower than those in the U.S., between 3.4% and 5.3% for represented countries in 2011 (according to Eurostat. "Crude Marriage Rate, Selected years, 1960–2011 per 1000 Inhabitants." http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Marriage_and_divorce_statistics [Table 1]. Accessed 23 May, 2013.) but European rates of cohabitation are higher than those in the U.S. These data are measured differently than marriage; in the United States, in 2000, about 5% of households were non-married, cohabiting, including opposite sex and same sex couples (according to U.S. Census. "Married-Couple and Unmarried-Partner Households: 2000." <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/censr-5.pdf>. Accessed 23 May, 2013.) though cohabitation in the U.S. has increased due to recent economic conditions. In Europe, only Switzerland and Italy have less cohabitation than the U.S. Other represented nations count cohabitation between 7% and 20% (according to OECD. Society at a Glance 2011: OECD Social Indicators. <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/>. Accessed 23 May, 2013.) so it is likely that the proportion of single individuals in these nations to be similar or less than in the U.S.

Age Group	IKAA Survey Participants % Single	US Census % Single
18-29	92%	79%
30-39	68%	40%
40-49	38%	35%
50-59 (64 for U.S. Census data)	50%	33%

of their populations either married or cohabiting, between 53% (France) and 66% (Belgium) with the U.S. falling in-between at 56%. For the purposes of this survey, “married” and “cohabiting” were merged into one category for purposes of comparison, as were “no relationship” and “non-cohabiting relationship” (as “single”). Although just under half (46.29%) of Americans aged 18-64 were single in 2010¹², almost 70% of the 174 responding IKAA survey participants were single. In order to understand if this is partly attributable to the age of conference attendees (since younger people are more likely to be single than older people), age groups were created for comparison.

Single Status by Age Group

Though it is possible that Korean adoptees are less inclined to be in serious relationships, we think that Korean adoptees in serious relationships are less likely to attend and IKAA Gathering than those with less serious partner commitments. Though this was not part of our short survey, stories of married adoptees who experience marital strife as a result of attending adoption focused events are common in organized Korean adoptee networks. Considering that adoptees are relatively rare and are therefore likely to form committed relationships with partners who are not themselves adopted, attending an expensive event that requires international travel and focuses only on the adoptee’s identity may not be a viable option for many adoptees who are married or cohabiting. Though the Gatherings have historically offered programming for non-adopted family members, this programming is minimal and adoptee experiences and needs are clearly at the center of the Gathering experience.

Of those surveyed, 12.8% reported they were divorced (mean age of divorced participants was 43), and 1.1% reported they were widowed (mean age of widowed participants was 44).

Of the 89 surveyed in current relationships (married, cohabiting or dating/non-cohabiting) 61.8% had White partners, 30.3% had Asian partners, 5.6% had Black partners and 1.1% had Latino/a partners. In 1999, half of men’s partners were White and half were Asian. Among women surveyed in 1999, 80% of partners were White, 13% were Asian and 3% were African-American.¹³ Though less than half of the respondents in our 2010 survey shared the races of past dating partners, most previous partners were either White or Asian.

¹² U.S. Census. “Married-Couple and Unmarried-Partner Households: 2000.” <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/censr-5.pdf>. Accessed 23 May, 2013

¹³ Freundlich and Lieberthal, *op. cit.*

Almost a quarter (22%) of respondents reported one or more children, also low compared to (American) statistics for parenthood, but it follows that if fewer than average survey participants are in committed relationships, fewer than average would have children. A number of factors could contribute to the low rate of parenthood among attendees, but it is unclear whether Korean adoptees as a population are less likely to become parents than their nonadopted counterparts or if these results are mostly because IKAA Gatherings in Seoul are less appealing to adoptees with children than to those without.

Adoptive Family Demographics

Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents reported having siblings in their adoptive families. Whether the remaining 33% are only children or if some proportion of the remainder chose not to reply to this question is unknown. For those who did respond, 40% reported only Asian siblings, 34% reported only White siblings and 15% reported Asian and White siblings (so 55% had Asian siblings, as compared to 1999 results which showed about half those surveyed had Korean siblings)¹⁴. Since the 98% of the total group who reported adoptive parent race were either adopted by White or Asian parents, (88% White, 12% Asian), it can be deduced that most Korean adoptees in the group lived in Asian-White biracial families.

Almost half of the adoptees surveyed have non-adopted siblings (47%), who are the biological children of their adoptive parents (compared to about a quarter in 1999).¹⁵ This finding could have significant implications for adoptees in mixed biological-adoptive families if parents differentiate between adopted and non-adopted children. It is also significant in light of the persistent popular belief that most adoptive parents adopt because of infertility.¹⁶ Clearly, this was not the case in the families of almost half of survey respondents with siblings. However, it is possible that some of these families became infertile (because of age or for other reasons) after the birth of biological children, or believed they were infertile as they made adoption plans.

Korean Adoption Experiences

Pre-Adoptive Histories

The ages at which those surveyed were adopted ranged from 3 months to 12 years. Median age at adoption for those surveyed was 2.23 years; in 1999, just over half of respondents (50.7%) were adopted at two years of age or younger.¹⁷ Age at adoption for respondents is correlated to current age, where older adoptees tended to be adopted at an older age. For those under age 29, average age at adoption was 11 months. For participants in their thirties, average age at adoption was 2.2 years. For those in their forties, average age at adoption was 3.7 years. For those over 50, the average age at adoption was almost 5 years.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Yuanqing Zhang and Gary R. Lee. "Intercountry Versus Transracial Adoption: Analysis of Adoptive Parents' Motivations and Preferences in Adoption." *Journal of Family Issues* January 2011 32: 75-98, first published on July 12, 2010 doi: 10.1177/0192513X10375410. Accessed 20 May, 2013.

¹⁷ Freundlich and Lieberthal, *op. cit.*

All 179 survey respondents responded to a question about placement before adoption, but since a few adoptees reported multiple placements before adoption there were more placement locations counted than respondents. Of all respondents, 40.3% were in foster care before adoption, 8% lived with birth family, 40.9% were in orphanages, 9.1% did not know, and 1.7% reported living arrangements other than those listed. The 1999 survey indicated that 62% of all respondents lived in orphanages, 33% lived with foster families, and 4% lived with birth families when their adoptions were finalized. Those who were adopted after the age of three years were far more likely to have been living in orphanages (91%) than not.¹⁸

Adoptees surveyed appeared to be less sure of the reasons for their separation from biological family than of their residence before adoption; over half of the respondents either did not respond to the question (15%) or reported they did not know (46%). This could indicate that a high proportion of adoptive families did not receive this information, or that the families received it and did not share it with adoptees. It was quite striking that almost half of the surveyed group has no knowledge of the reason for their separation even though almost 90% knew where they spent the time between separation from birth family and adoption. This data suggests that, for many adult Korean adoptees today, identity (in terms of knowledge of one's origin story) begins with entry into the adoption system, and information about the reasons for this entry are obscured. These data are consistent with the legal and social "clean break" that has characterized Korean and much other transnational adoption and with the erasure of adoptee biological and social origins.

For the 39% of the respondents who did know the reason for their separation from biological family, 21% reported that they were from single-parent households, 18% said they were given up because of poverty, 4% reported they were lost children who became accidentally separated from family who were not found, 4% reported they were given up because of a death in the family, 4% reported they were placed by a family member other than a parent, possibly indicating that the birth parent or parents did not make the decision for relinquishment, and 1% reported abuse in the birth family. Though respondents were invited to respond with all reasons for separation that applied, few marked more than one answer, even though single-parent households could be created by a death of one parent, and single-parent conditions could easily lead to economic impoverishment.

Exposure and Involvement with Birth Culture

Almost half of adoptees surveyed reported they never had exposure to their birth culture as children, and this was comparable to the adoptees surveyed in 1999.¹⁹ It is likely that younger adoptees would have more exposure to birth culture than those from older generations, as greater emphasis was placed on birth culture exposure as an important element of raising transnational adoptees by social workers in the 1980s and afterwards. This trend was borne out in our survey population: 45% of participants under age 29, 54% of participants aged 30–39, 59% of participants aged 40–49 and 67% of participants aged 50–59 reported no exposure to Korean culture growing up.

For the 85 respondents (just over 47% of all participants) who did report exposure to Korean heritage as children, connecting with other Korean adoptees was the most common

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

form of cultural exposure (48%). Meeting other Korean adoptees was also the only type of Korean heritage exposure that was reported in all age groups. This was followed in frequency by visiting Korea (38%), attending Korean culture camp (35%), and connecting with non-adopted Koreans (19%). More than half identified multiple forms of exposure to Korean heritage. In 1999, survey results indicated that exposure to Korean heritage was mostly event-driven (meaning mostly connected to adoption-related heritage events),²⁰ but this may reflect differences in how participants were surveyed; the 2010 survey did not include a question specifically focused on culture-related events.

One can hypothesize that, because of changes in attitudes about the benefits of exposure to birth culture in the past 50 years, the oldest respondents would have had less exposure to Korean heritage than younger respondents, and this was borne out in our survey results. The oldest group of respondents (over age 50) had the least exposure to Korean heritage (66.7% reported that they had none while growing up). Of respondents aged 40-49, 59.1% had no exposure to Korean heritage, in the 30-39 age group 54.1% had none, and in the group under 30, 25.3% had no exposure to Korean heritage.

Most survey participants responded (97%) when asked if they spoke any Korean, though 81% of respondents spoke no Korean or only a few words. Of the remainder, 16% spoke some Korean, and only 3% considered themselves fluent. This is in contrast to a quarter of those surveyed in 1999 who reported speaking any Korean.²¹

Birth Search and Birth Family Reunion

The results of the 2010 survey indicate that the majority of Gathering attendees have searched for birth information; 67% of the surveyed group indicated they had initiated some type of birth search at some time in their lives. This may be higher than average among Korean adoptees due to the fact that all participants were in Korea at the time of survey; many adoptees are motivated to initiate or continue search efforts by a visit to Korea, while others visit Korea specifically to carry out a birth family search. In 1999, only 22% of the adoptees had searched or were currently searching for birth family members, though 34% reported interest in doing so. Eleven respondents (7% of those surveyed) were in contact with birth family members, while fourteen respondents (8% of those surveyed) had received some information regarding their birth families.²²

Of the 120 2010 surveyed adoptees who had initiated searches, 73% had found at least some new information. The discovery of new information if in Korea could indicate that adoptive country adoption records are generally not complete, that information is made available to adoptees as adults that could not be disclosed to adoptive families (such as information that identifies the birth family), or that some adoptees are not supplied with even the adoption records given to their adoptive families. Of those who searched, 53% had found family members. This is an extremely high proportion given that, according to the Overseas Korean Foundation, only 8.3% of adoptees who searched for Korean family between 2000 and 2005 found relatives,²³ meaning the rate of success in finding birth family for the survey group was over 6 times higher than that reported by the OKF. It is

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ International Korean Adoptee Resource Book, *op. cit.*, 621-622.

possible that participants in the IKAA Gatherings have a high degree of self-identification as Korean adoptees and are more likely to have searched for birth family than the general Korean adoptee population. In addition, Gathering attendees who had found birth family would have additional reasons to visit Korea, and attending the Gathering may be an opportunity to make one trip to Korea to both attend the conference and to visit or meet birth family. In any case, this is an additional indication that the IKAA “community” may have fundamental differences from the general Korean adoptee population.

Of adoptees who had found birth family members, 78% had reunited, or actually met their family members. Of these, most met one or both parents (70%), though 22% did not specify which family member they had met. Of those who reunited, 89% had maintained some kind of relationship with a birth family member or members.

Of the 64 adoptees who disclosed their method of search (about half of the total number of respondents who had searched), the majority (64%) had used their adoption agency or agencies in order to facilitate their searches, while 8% used public media such as television or newspaper appearances, and 24% used other methods.

Return to Korea

Participants reported a range of experience in visiting Korea; some had never been in Korea before, while others had been there up to several dozen times.

Age Group	First time to Korea	Average number of visits to Korea
< 29	N= 21, 43%	2
30-39	N=18, 21%	4
40-49	N= 5, 23%	6
50-59	N=1, 1%	9

With the exception of conference planners, who had been traveling to Korea in connection with planning Gathering events triannually since 2004, this large number of repeat visitors probably had a variety of reasons to visit Korea, and used the Gathering as another reason to come to Korea, as well as to connect with other adoptees. Almost 30% of survey participants were living in Korea, or had lived there previously. It is likely that any Gathering has strong appeal for local adoptees, and even though resident adoptee populations in almost every adoptive country are larger than the population of Korean adoptees currently living in Korea, this local population attended the Gathering in Korea in significant numbers. Like other repeat visitors, participants who had lived in Korea but were not resident there at the time of the Gathering may have been using the event as a reason to return to Korea.

Identity

Eighty-eight percent of all adoptees surveyed responded when asked about their current ethnic identity. Of the respondents who used a racial or Asian ethnic identifier: 16% identified as Korean, 21.8% identified as Korean in addition to their adoptive country

nationality, 12.8% identified as Asian, 8.4% identified as AmerAsian or multiethnic, and 14.1% identified as Korean adoptees. A further 18.6% identified with their adoptive nation only and the remaining 5.1% responded with another designation or said they did not know. Only 3.2% identified as White.

Respondents wrote in their answers to this question, and it is not clear that ethnicity meant the same thing to all respondents. “Ethnicity” may be understood to indicate race (likely with those who indicated Asian, Asian American, or White identity), national origin (for those who indicated Korean), current nationality (for those who identified with their country of adoption), or identity with the global or nationalized community of adoptees (for those who identified as Korean adoptees or as Korean adopted in addition to their adoptive nationality). The 14.1% who identified primarily as adoptees are particularly noteworthy. Individuals choosing an adoptee identity may well be over-represented in this population, reflecting both the high value placed on adoptee identity at the Gathering and a tendency for those who specifically identify as adoptees to attend. As varied as the understandings of ethnicity may be within this group, the choice of an identity among adoptees is meaningful, and sometimes highly politicized.²⁴

Also noteworthy is the high degree of national identification among European adoptees when compared to American adoptees; of the 19% of respondents who identified only with a (presumably adoptive) nation—Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, France or America—only 4% of respondents adopted to the United States (n=99) identified as solely American, while 14% of those adopted to Sweden (n=22) identified as only Swedish in ethnicity, 55% of those adopted to Denmark (n=21) identified as only Danish, 43% of those adopted to the Netherlands (n=14) identified as only Dutch, and two-thirds of those adopted to France (n=6) identified as only French. Since the numbers of participants from each of these countries varies, it is difficult to compare them exactly, but this result may point to a greater saliency of national identity in the European context as compared to North America, and to a general lack of acceptance of racial identities as nationalized sub-identities in Europe. For American adoptees, the development of an identity around race can be useful social tool within the American social context, but in Europe, the assertion of a racial identity may be seen as competing with rather than complementing a national identity.

When asked if their ethnic identity had been different in the past, only 34 of the 179 participants (19%) responded. For almost half of these (47%), that past identity was White, and these individuals have presumably moved on to a non-white identity. Notably, both European and American adoptees reported that they had once identified in terms of their national identity only but no longer did so.

Very few of those surveyed reported having had a different ethnic identity in the past, and this may mean that very few in the group had experienced a change in identity during their lifetimes. At the time of our survey, only 3% of respondents currently claimed a white identity. However, the low rate of response to this question may also reflect discomfort with the question itself; as mentioned above, the act of claiming a specific racial, national, community or ethnic identity for adoptees can carry significant weight and meaning. Identification as White, or at least as undifferentiated from the adoptive family, is often

²⁴ For more in depth discussions of this topic see the work of Korean adoption researchers Eleana Kim, Richard M. Lee, Kathleen Bergquist, and Tobias Hübinette.

Country of Adoption	Participants	Adoptive Country Only Identity	Percentage
<i>North America</i>	102	4	4%
USA	99	4	4%
Canada	3	0	0%
<i>Europe</i>	81	25	31%
Belgium	3	0	0%
Denmark	21	12	57%
France	6	4	67%
Netherlands	14	6	25%
Italy	1	0	0%
Norway	3	0	0%
Sweden	22	3	14%
Switzerland	1	0	0%

rewarded in family contexts but punished outside the family as “racial confusion.”²⁵ Even within adoptee communities, there is sometimes a sense that adoptees who identify as White are “not evolved” in their understanding of their identity as transracial adoptees because they do not see themselves as Koreans, Korean adoptees, or at least as Asian. For these reasons, it is possible that this question would appear overly personal and loaded to adoptee respondents.

The 1999 report showed that while growing up, approximately one-third of Korean adoptees identified as White/Caucasian. In contrast, only 11% viewed themselves as White/Caucasian as adults. Just over a quarter of Korean adoptees viewed themselves as Korean-American/European (28%) as children, while 64% of adults currently identified themselves as such.²⁶

Interestingly, the 1999 survey yielded varying results regarding ethnic identity based on gender. Although a majority of respondents were female, the report revealed several important trends. Both men and women had primarily identified as Caucasian while growing up. Adult adoptee females were less than half as likely to have identified as Caucasian as adults than when they were children. In contrast, none of the males identified as Caucasian at the time of survey, compared to 45% of them who had primarily identified as Caucasian as children.²⁷ The 2010 survey yielded similar responses; though fewer men than women participated in the survey, men who responded to the question about past racial identity were more likely than female respondents to have identified as White in the past.

²⁵ Park Nelson, Kim. “Adoptees as ‘White’ Koreans: Identity, Racial Visibility and the Politics of Passing among Korean American Adoptees” in *Proceedings of the First International Korean Adoption Studies Research Symposium*, eds. Kim Park Nelson, Eleana Kim, and Lene Myong Petersen. International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA), Seoul, South Korea: 2007.

²⁶ Freundlich and Lieberthal, *op. cit.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Experiences of Discrimination

When asked about discrimination experiences, 94% of those surveyed responded, and of the respondents, 81% reported having experienced discrimination as either a child (20%) or as an adult (8%) or both as a child and as an adult (53%). This is consistent with the results of the 1999 survey, in which many adoptees reported experiences of discrimination while growing up. When asked specifically about discrimination for having been adopted, 69% responded and 65% of respondents said they had never been discriminated against for this reason. This is consistent with the 1999 results in that most adoptees reported having experienced discrimination related to their racial or ethnic identities rather than to their adoptee identities. Respondents reported experiencing discrimination regarding their adoptions, perceived racial identities, racial or ethnic stereotypes, and gender (both combined with race and without).

For those who did feel they had been discriminated against for having been adopted, most (73%) said this had happened to them as children rather than as adults. This finding may reflect a core difference in discrimination experiences present in Korean adoptive families where the vast majority of parents are White. While many adoptive families experience unwanted attention directed at transracially and/or transnationally adopted members of the family the discrimination families experience, particularly that which White adoptive parents experience, is often related to their children not being perceived as members of the parents' "real" families or insensitivity towards their adoption experiences as parents (e.g. "Where did you get her?" or "How much did he cost?"). However, in this survey, most Korean adoptees did not experience discrimination for being adopted after they leave home, but did experience racial discrimination, which the majority white adoptive parents probably do not experience, and may not even be able to fully understand.

Access to/Use of Adoption Related Services

Small to moderate numbers of those surveyed indicated they had used post-adoption services, and assistance with birth records and Korean language instruction were the most used post-adoption services accessed by the survey group. Because of the lack of comprehensive post-adoption services, incidence of use does not necessarily convey level of demand; in some ways, the ICAA Gathering itself is a post-adoption service, as it is specifically designed to meet the interests and needs of adoptee attendees in multiple ways.

Though post-reunion services are a type of post-adoption service, needs related to reunion with birth family should be considered separately from other types of post-adoption services. As birth search becomes more common among adoptees, and because younger adoptees tend to be more successful in finding birth family, the number of adoptees who will want to access post-reunion services is likely to rise. In addition, birth family reunion is usually a difficult time for adoptees, and the needed services intensive. In our survey group, while only 13% had used post-reunion services, only 28% had reunion experiences and thus had reason to access these services. Of the 50 surveyed who had reunited, almost half used post-reunion services, 34% used translation services to communicate with birth family, and 10% used immigration services for birth family.

A majority of those who responded expressed interest in Korean dual citizenship, though few adoptees have gone through the formal process to become dual citizens since provisions were passed in South Korea in 2011.

Conclusions

In 1999, all of the roughly 400 Korean adoptees attending the Gathering conference were invited to complete a survey about their adoptee experience, and 167 responded. Freundlich and Lieberthal summarized the results in “The Gathering of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees: Adoptees’ Perceptions of International Adoption.” In 2010, 179 Korean adoptees attending the popular age breakout sessions at the ICAA Gathering were invited to participate in a new survey intended to capture information about demographics, adoption experiences, and use of and interest in post-adoption services. There were several differences and similarities in the captured data. Though the mean ages of conference participants was similar (31 in 1999 and 34 in 2010), other demographic data was different. While there were still more women than men at the 2010 conference (66% women in 2010, as compared to 82% women in 1999), the gender breakdown in 2010 was more reflective of gender representation among Korean adoptees in general. The 2010 conference, which took place in Korea, had proportional representation of Americans to European adoptees, unlike the 1999 conference that took place in the U.S. and was attended overwhelmingly by American adoptees. Adoptee attendees at both the 1999 and 2010 Gatherings were highly educated compared to the general populations of their adoptive nations, though attendees at the 2010 conference had an extremely high rate of post-graduate degree attainment. Survey participants in 2010 were more likely to be single (70%) than 1999 participants (56% single), and less likely to have White partners.

Participants in 2010 reported Asian or Korean-related self-identification at a higher rate as adults, and a lower rate of identifying as White as adults than in 1999, though a similar proportion in both years reported having had opportunities to explore their Korean identities and cultures as children.

Almost three times more participants had completed birth searches in 2010 than in 1999, and those who had done so reported much higher rates of success in finding birth family: 53% of those who searched had found family in 2010, while in 1999, only 30% found family. In both years, the degree of search and success in finding birth family is well over the search and success rate of the population of all Korean adoptees, suggesting that those who search and reunite are more likely to attend such a conference.

Clearly, both the 1999 and 2010 surveys rely on data from a skewed survey population; both survey populations self-selected by choosing to attend a Korean adoptee-centered conference. In 2010, the fact that the conference was held in Korea probably encouraged adoptees from both Europe and North America to attend, but it is notable that middle- or upper-middle-class professionals attended in particularly high numbers (though income data was not collected due to the difficulty of controlling for income and standard of living differentials in the many nations represented). Most likely, cost is a barrier to adoptee participation in the Gatherings, and this is probably particularly true for the last three Gatherings, which have taken place in South Korea. For both European and North American attendees, who constituted the strong majority of respondents (92%), 2010 airfares to Seoul were over US\$1000/€790, hotel stays in the conference hotel over US\$750/€600 and the conference fee ranged from US\$175-300/€140-240. Most attendees would therefore pay over \$2000/€1580 before meals and incidental expenses in order to attend. In addition, combined cost, time and travel restraints may have discouraged parenting and/or partnered adoptees from attending the conference if they had to travel

overseas to attend. It is notable that despite the relatively small population of Korean overseas adoptees residing in South Korea, several adoptees living in Korea at the time of the event attended. Because the global population of Korean adoptees is so widely dispersed, adoptee-focused conferences tend to have high local attendance, there would be an advantage for future events to be planned for locations with larger Korean adoptee populations in order to take advantage of this tendency.

Because of participant self-selection, many individual survey questions went unanswered (in particular, questions related to educational attainment, adoptee family demographics, and rate of birth search and reunion were answered by fewer participants than other items), questions remain about whether there are characteristics particular to Korean adoptee experiences, especially around developing and maintaining primary relationships. In a time when Korean adoption researchers are becoming increasingly interested in adoptee birth search, future research should also address the actual rate of birth search and reunion in the overall Korean adoptee population, as the rates reported both by adoption agencies and in this survey cannot be considered accurate representations of the larger Korean adoptee population. Because other research²⁸ has indicated that Korean adoptees tend to date within their adoptive race rather than within their birth race, it was surprising to see a high incidence of partnering with other Asians in this sample. Given the limitations of the survey sample, future research should aim to ask similar questions of a broader survey population.

Overall, results of the current survey provide important information regarding the significance of adult Korean adoptees' experiences surrounding birth search and adult relationships. This information is particularly important as it speaks to unique life-span occurrences for Korean adoptees as adults, an area that has remained underrepresented in the scholarly discourse surrounding international adoption. It is important that future researchers make efforts to examine current and relevant issues for adult Korean adoptees, particularly as they age and reach adulthood.

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²⁸ See Shiao, Jiannbin Lee and Mia H. Tuan. "Some Asian Men are Attractive to Me, but for a Husband...? Korean Adoptees and the Saliency of Race in Romance." *Du Bois Review*, 5:2, 259-285, 2008; Dijkstra, Peter D., Daniel Schwegendiek, and Paul T.Y. Preenen, "Gender-Asymmetry in Dating Success of Korean Adoptees in the West." *Sociology Mind* 1:3, 91-95. 2011.

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Appendix: 2010 Survey Questionnaire

IKAA Gathering 2010 Age Breakout Group Participant Survey

1. **Gender:** Female Male Transgender/Other
2. **Sexuality:** Heterosexual Gay/Lesbian Bisexual Other
3. **Country of residence:** _____
4. **Country to which you were adopted:** _____
- 5a. **Year of Birth:** _____ 5b. **Age at Adoption:** (indicate yrs or months) _____
6. **Check your Highest Degree of Educational Attainment:**
 Less than High School High School Some College Undergrad degree
 Some Grad School Professional degree Masters degree Doctoral degree
7. **What is your occupation/profession?** _____
8. **Residence prior to adoption:** Foster home w/birth family Orphanage
 Don't know Other (please list) _____
9. **Reason separated from birth family** (*Check all that apply*) Single Parent
 Poverty Abuse in family Lost child Placed by family member other than birth mother or father
 Don't know Other (*Please List*) _____
10. **Race of Adoptive Parents** (*check all that apply*): Asian White
 Black/African Origin Latino/a Indigenous Other _____
- 11a. **Do you have siblings in your adoptive family? If so, were they** (*Check all that apply*):
 Adopted from Korea Domestically adopted from the country where you were raised
 Adopted internationally from (*please list country*) _____
 Not adopted, born to your adoptive parents
- 11b. **What is/are the race(s) of your sibling(s)** _____
12. **What is your current ethnic identity?** _____
13. **If you have previously identified as a different ethnic identity, what was it?**

- 14a. **If you have children, please list their:** gender(s) _____ age(s) _____
- 14b. **If any of your children are adopted, in what country or countries were they born?**

- 15a. **Are you currently in a primary relationship?**
 No Yes married/cohabitating Yes, not married/cohabiting
- 15b. **If so, what is the race of this person?**
 Asian White Black/African origin Latino/a Indigenous Other
- 15c. **In the past, what is the race of those you have dated?** (*check all that apply*)
 Asian White Black/African origin Latino/a Indigenous Other
- 15d. **Are you:** Divorced Widowed
16. **Did you explore your Korean heritage growing up?** No Yes, through cultural camps

Yes, by visiting Korea
 Yes, by connecting w/non-adopted Koreans

Yes, by connecting w/other Korean adoptees
 Other

17. Do you feel that you have experienced discrimination
 No
 Yes as a child
 Yes, as an adult

18. Do you feel you have experienced discrimination for being adopted?
 No
 Yes as a child
 Yes, as an adult

19. Do you speak Korean:
 No
 A few words
 Some proficiency
 Fluently

20a. How many times have you been to Korea? _____

20b. If you lived in Korea, for how long did you live here? _____

20c. Have you ever held an F-4 visa?
 No
 Yes

20d. Are you interested in dual citizenship? (Korea + your adoptive country)
 No
 Yes

21a. Have you engaged in birth family search? If so, did you (please check all which apply)
 Find no new information
 Gain new information from your birth records that you didn't previously know
 Find birth family (please list mother, father, siblings, etc.) _____
 Reunite w/birth family (please list mother, father, siblings, etc.) _____

21b. If you reunited, how did you find you family?
 Agency post-adoption services
 Advice from adopted friends
 Public media (TV shows, newspapers)
 Other _____

21c. If you have reunited with birth family, have you maintained a relationship with them?
 No
 Yes

22. Have other members of your family have searched for your birth family? If so, what is their relationship to you? (your sibling, adoptive parent, children) _____

23. Have you used any of the following post-adoption services? (check all that apply)
 Counseling related to your adoption
 Counseling for other issue(s)
 Assistance locating birth or adoption records
 Assistance related to birth family search
 Assistance related to post-reunion relationships w/birth or adoptive family members. If so, please describe the type(s) of assistance used (i.e. translation, counseling, cultural education) _____

Korean language instruction. If so, please note whether you have a particular motivation for learning Korean: _____
 Education or information about Korean culture
 Immigration services to bring birth family to your adoptive country
 Immigration services for yourself
 Other _____

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE GATHERING: IKAA 2010 KOREAN ADOPTEE SURVEY SUMMARY

*Kim Park Nelson, Ph.D.; Kimberly Langrehr, Ph.D.;
Nate Bae Kupel, MSW*

IKAA Korean Adoptee Survey

- Paper Surveys ~ 10 minutes to complete
- Collected demographic, adoption, identity and post-adoption service usage data
- Took place during “age breakout sessions”
- 179 of about 500 IKAA registrants participated, just over 400 of which were adult Korean adoptees

2010 IKAA Gathering Survey

IKAA Gathering 2010 Age Breakout Group Participant Survey

1. Gender: Female Male Transgender/Other

2. Sexuality: Heterosexual Gay/Lesbian Bisexual Other

3. Country of residence: _____

4. Country to which you were adopted: _____

5a. Year of Birth: _____ 5b. Age at Adoption: (indicate yrs or months) _____

6. Check your Highest Degree of Educational Attainment:
 Less than High School High School Some College Undergrad degree
 Some Grad School Professional degree Masters degree Doctoral degree

7. What is your occupation/profession? _____

8. Residence prior to adoption: Foster home w/birth family Orphanage
 Don't know Other (please list) _____

9. Reason separated from birth family (Check all that apply) Single Parent
 Poverty Abuse in family Lost child Placed by family member other than birth mother or father
 Don't know Other (Please List) _____

10. Race of Adoptive Parents (check all that apply):
 Black/African Origin Latino/a Indigenous Asian White
 Other _____

11a. Do you have siblings in your adoptive family? If so, were they (Check all that apply):
 Adopted from Korea Domestically adopted from the country where you were raised
 Adopted internationally from (please list country) _____
 Not adopted, born to your adoptive parents _____

11b. What is/are the race(s) of your sibling(s) _____

12. What is your current ethnic identity? _____

13. If you have previously identified as a different ethnic identity, what was it? _____

14a. If you have children, please list their: gender(s) _____ age(s) _____

14b. If any of your children are adopted, in what country or countries were they born? _____

15a. Are you currently in a primary relationship?
 No Yes married/cohabitating Yes, not married/cohabitating

15b. If so, what is the race of this person?
 Asian White Black/African origin Latino/a Indigenous Other _____

15c. In the past, what is the race of those you have dated? (check all that apply)
 Asian White Black/African origin Latino/a Indigenous Other _____

15d. Are you: Divorced Widowed

16. Did you explore your Korean heritage growing up? No Yes, through cultural camps

1

_____ Yes, by visiting Korea Yes, by connecting w/non-adopted Koreans

_____ Yes, by connecting w/other Korean adoptees Other

17. Do you feel that you have experienced discrimination
 No Yes as a child Yes, as an adult

18. Do you feel you have experienced discrimination for being adopted?
 No Yes as a child Yes, as an adult

19. Do you speak Korean: No A few words Some proficiency Fluently

20a. How many times have you been to Korea? _____

20b. If you lived in Korea, for how long did you live here? _____

20c. Have you ever held an F-4 visa? No Yes

20d. Are you interested in dual citizenship? (Korea + your adoptive country) No Yes

21a. Have you engaged in birth family search? If so, did you (please check all which apply)
 Find no new information Gain new information from your birth records that you didn't previously know
 Find birth family (please list mother, father, siblings, etc.) _____
 Reunite w/birth family (please list mother, father, siblings, etc.) _____

21b. If you reunited, how did you find you family?
 Agency post-adoption services Advice from adopted friends
 Public media (TV shows, newspapers) Other _____

21c. If you have reunited with birth family, have you maintained a relationship with them?
 No Yes

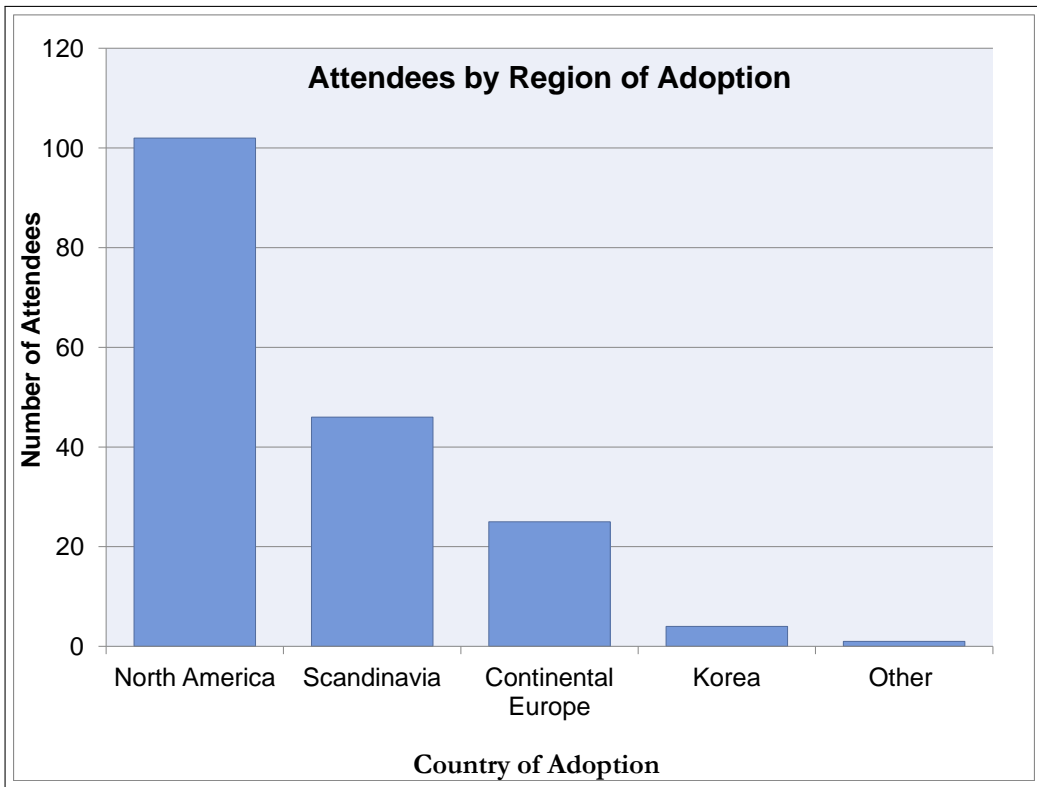
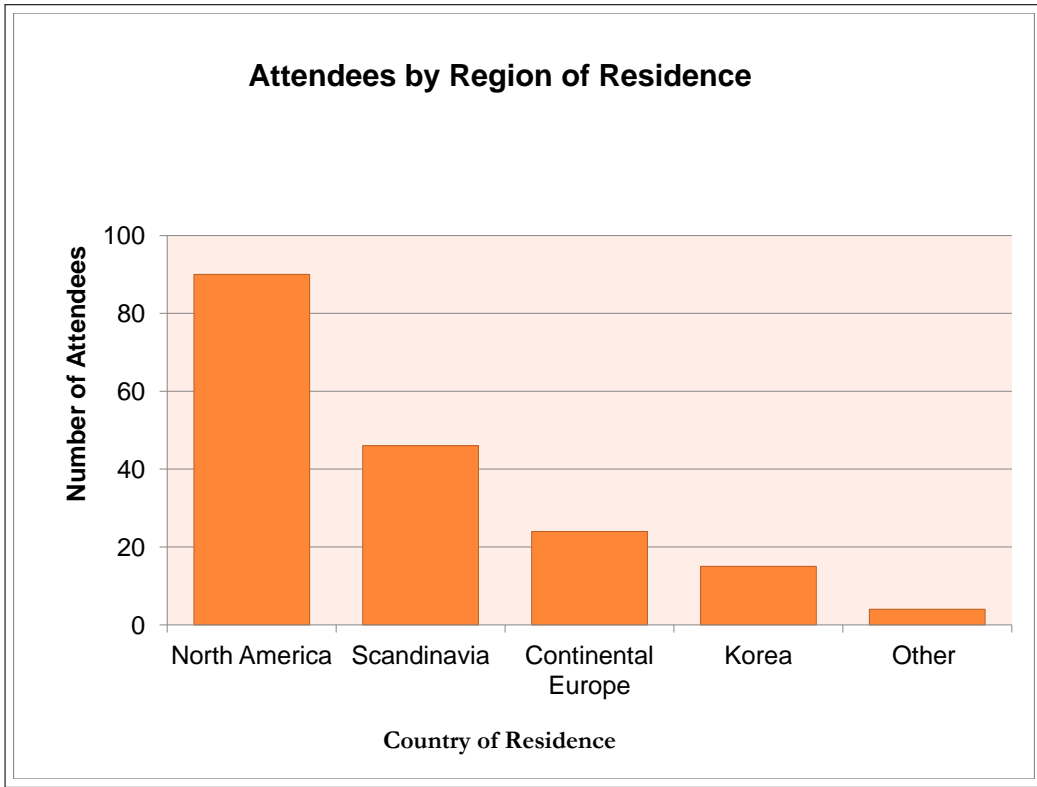
22. Have other members of your family have searched for your birth family? If so, what is their relationship to you? (your sibling, adoptive parent, children) _____

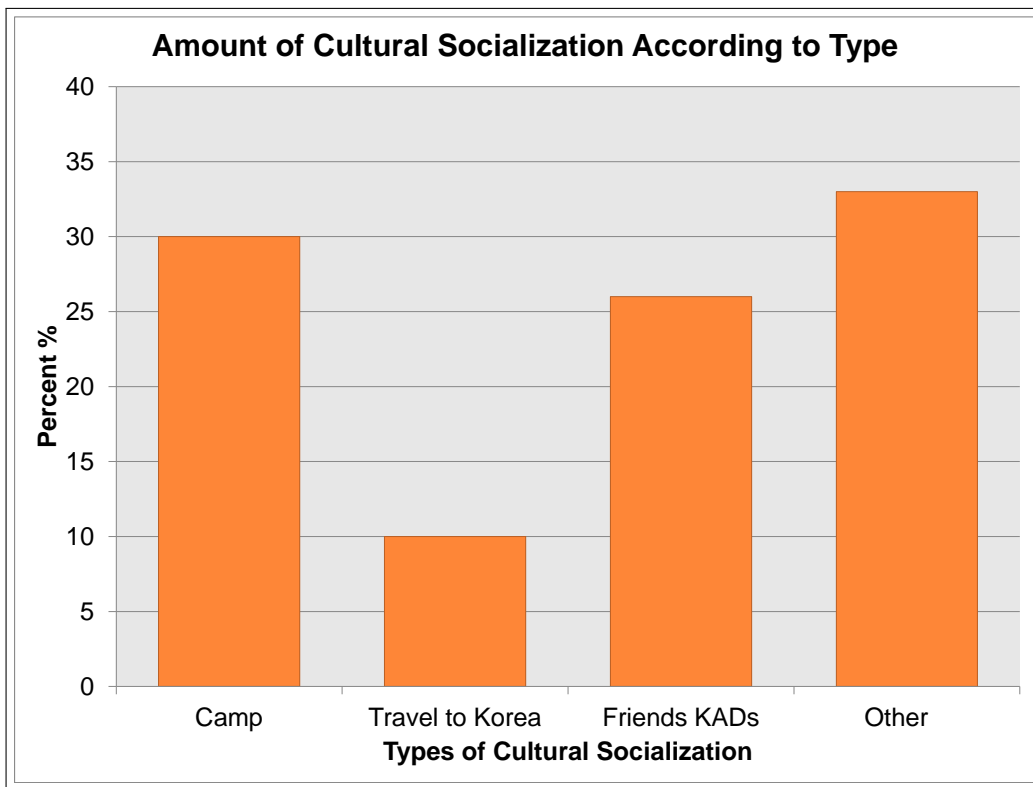
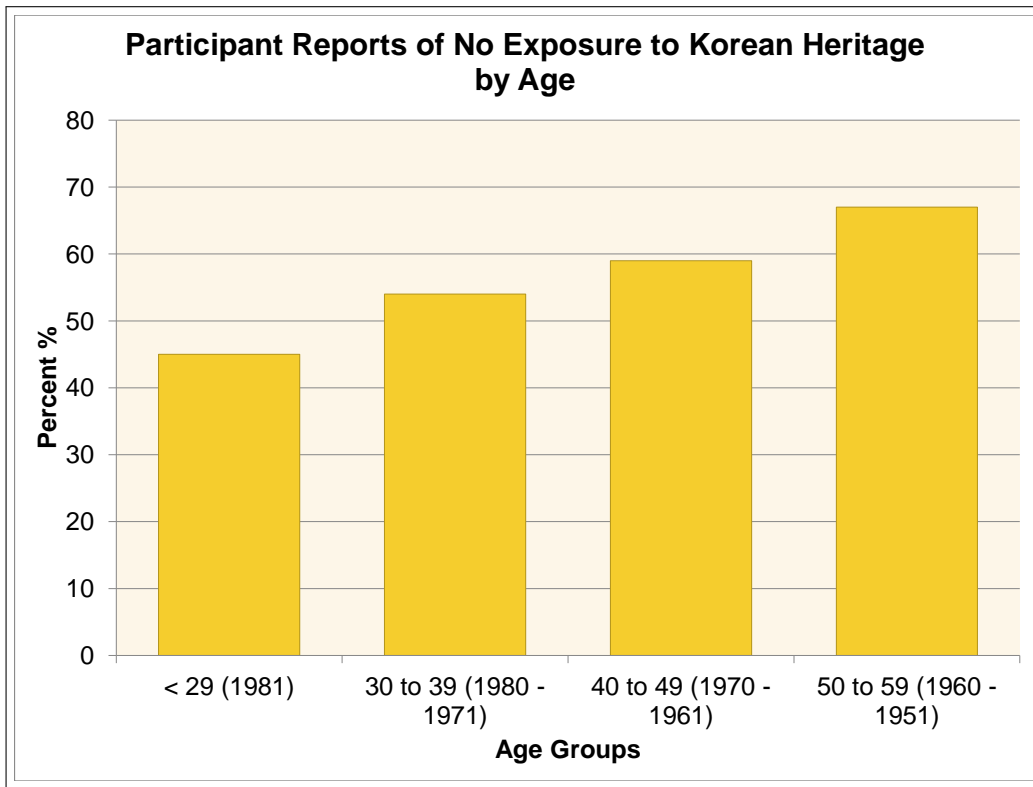
23. Have you used any of the following post-adoption services? (check all that apply)
 Counseling related to your adoption Counseling for other issue(s)
 Assistance locating birth or adoption records Assistance related to birth family search
 Assistance related to post-reunion relationships w/birth or adoptive family members. If so, please describe the type(s) of assistance used (e.g. translation, counseling, cultural education) _____
 Korean language instruction. If so, please note whether you have a particular motivation for learning Korean: _____
 Education or information about Korean culture _____
 Immigration services to bring birth family to your adoptive country _____
 Immigration services for yourself Other _____

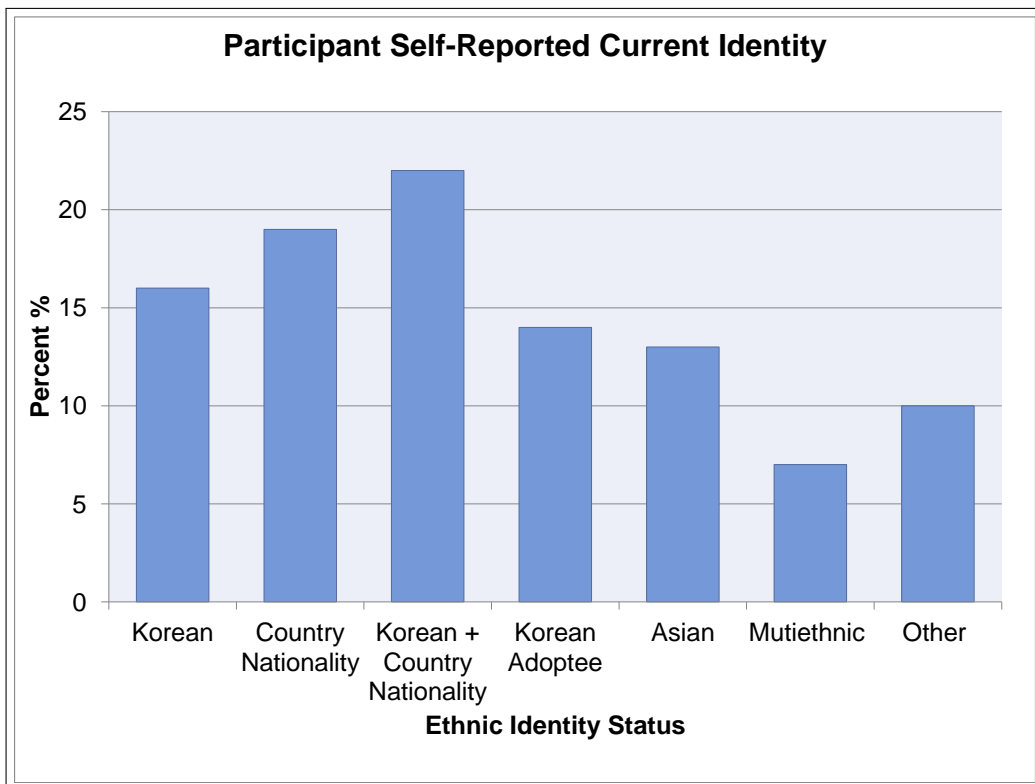
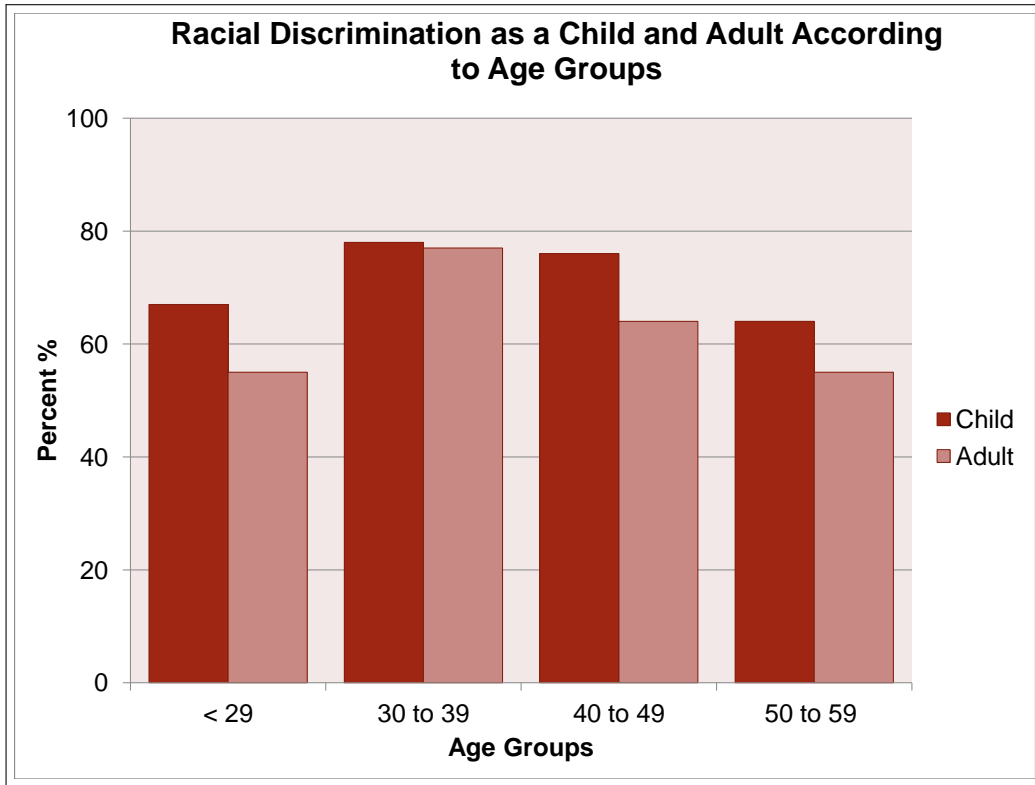
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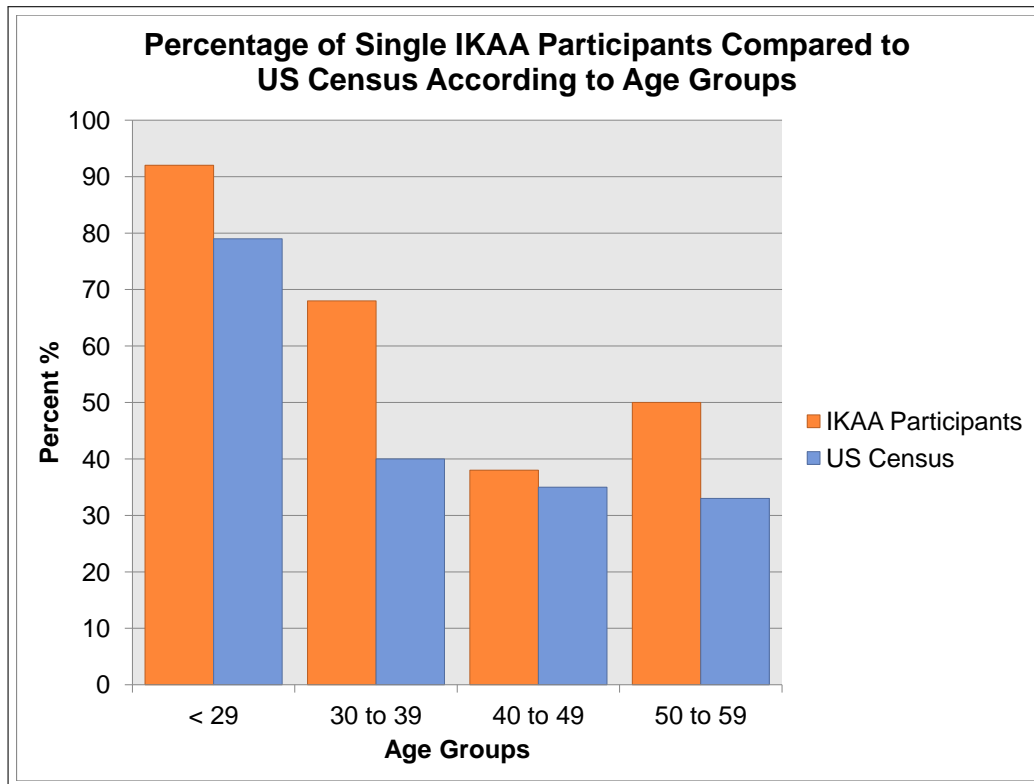
General Demographics

- Mean Age = 34.18 (older than mean age for all adoptees)
- Age Group Breakdown
 - < 29 years=51,29% (54%)
 - 30 to 39=89, 50% (~40%)
 - 40 to 49=25, 14% (over 41=5%)
 - 50 to 59=11,7% (over 41=5%)
- Females = 118, 66%
- Males = 50, 34%
- Adoptees from 11 nations
- Tended to be more highly educated, less likely to be married or cohabiting, and less likely to have children than national averages in their adoptive countries









Results and Interpretations

- Half of respondents were in primary relationships (dating, cohabiting, married)
- Higher incidence of single adoptees in comparison to US Census
- 46.9% of American adoptees (18-64) were single but almost 70% of all 174 survey participants were single

Primary Relationships By Race

89 in primary relationships

61.8% White

30.3% Asian

5.6% Black

1.1% Latino/Latina

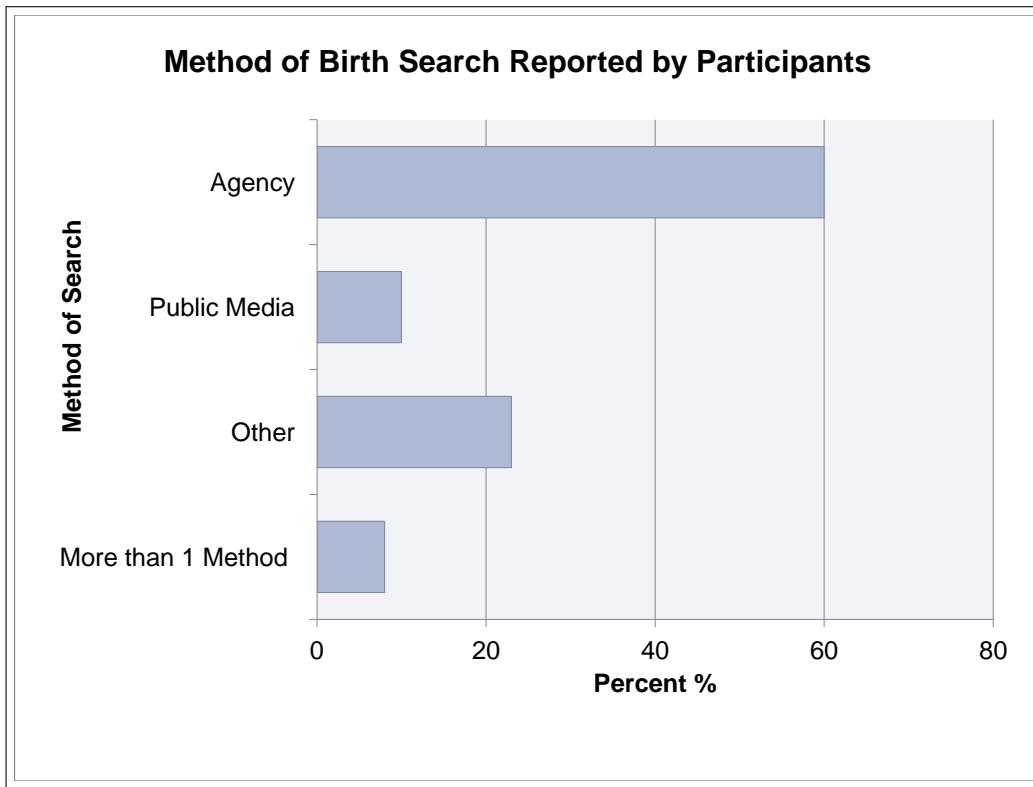
Birth Search

2010 Gathering Survey Participants

- 67% have engaged in birth search
- 53% of those who searched found one or more family members

All Korean Adoptees

- Unknown how many have engaged in birth search
- According to OKF, just over 8% of adoptees who conduct birth search find birth family



Birth Search Results

- 78% of those who found biological family reunited
- 70% of those who reunited met one or both birth parents
- 89% of those who reunited maintained some relationship with birth relatives

In Summary

- 2010 ICAA Survey participants reflected Korean adoptees generally in gender and adoptive country representation, but tended to be single, highly educated, and childless as compared to general populations
- European adoptees are more likely to identify solely with their adoptive nationality than American adoptees
- Despite changes in attitude about exposure to birth culture, exposure to Korean heritage remains low for many Korean adoptees

In Summary

- Most adoptees, regardless of age and adoptive country, have experienced racial discrimination both as children as adults
- In acculturating themselves as Koreans, Korean adoptees are more likely to encounter other adoptees than Korean culture, language, or Korean ethnics
- Gathering attendees have a very high incidence of birth search and reunion

