Exploring the Identities of Korean Americans Through Identity Journey Mapping in a Study Abroad Program

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the identities of Korean American college students through identity journey maps during a faculty-led study abroad program in Korea. Drawing from Asian Critical theory (AsianCrit), this study presents how participants of Korean descent challenged a monolithic and unitary notion of Korean American identity while acknowledging the multifaceted, dynamic, and fluid nature of their transnational identity. Furthermore, it suggests that identity journey maps can serve as a pedagogical tool to counter racial stereotypes and discrimination against Asian Americans.

KEYWORDS: AsianCrit, Asianization, transnational identity, agency, identity journey mapping, study abroad

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Asian immigrants and Asian Americans in the United States frequently encounter racial discrimination and stereotyping that have detrimental impacts on their sense of self. In addition to an ongoing image of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners (Lee et al., 2017), they deal with stereotypes of either model or deviant minorities (Lee, 2006; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Park 2011), which further exacerbates their predicament. Moreover, Asian Americans are often subject to the propagation of harmful yellow risks and diseases (e.g., COVID-19) (Wu et al., 2023), while Asian women specifically face the degrading phenomenon of racial sexualization (Cho, 2003). These challenges engender a

continuous struggle for Asian Americans to negotiate their identities on a daily basis. Nonetheless, Asian American voices are often marginalized or silenced in scholarly and pedagogical realms for multicultural education. In particular, a recent study on Asian American experiences in the United States reveals that 67% of Korean Americans reported encountering racial discrimination, marking the highest percentage among the various Asian American communities (Ruiz et al., 2023).

To this end, this study aims to amplify the voices of Korean American college students by examining how they (re)negotiate their identities in the context of a study abroad program situated in South Korea (hereafter Korea). Employing identity journey mapping as a research and pedagogical tool, Korean American undergraduate students from the US Midwest reflect on their racialized and gendered identities during study abroad. Furthermore, the study discusses the benefits and considerations of utilizing identity journey mapping as a pedagogical tool in multicultural education.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, we discuss the foundation and principles of Asian critical theory and our purpose of using this framework to analyze participant data. The second subsection provides definitions of identity and agency that are applied throughout the article to explore Asian critical theory and the participants' experience as Korean Americans. The final subsection explains the intentionality for employing identity journey mapping as a pedagogical tool, followed by the research questions guiding our study.

Asian Critical Theory

As a subfield of critical race theory (CRT), Asian critical theory (AsianCrit) is a conceptual framework that challenges the systematic oppression and racism against Asian Americans. While CRT was created to address white supremacy in legal practice to focus on the communities of color experiencing racism within the legal system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023), AsianCrit centers the systematic racism against Asian Americans in the United States (An, 2016; Chang, 1993; Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus & Iftikar, 2014; Reyes, 2018). This study adopts a tailored framework of AsianCrit, drawing from the concepts of CRT in education, to explore the perspectives of Asian Americans (Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Museus & Iftikar, 2014). As with education scholars who adopted CRT to center research and pedagogy on challenging white, middle-class communities as the norm for which all others are judged and valued (Yosso, 2005), AsianCrit scholars focus on the varying racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of Asian Americans in contexts that cement the necessity of analyzing identity negotiation through counterstories to policies and standards that leave out Asian American histories

and voices. Within AsianCrit, seven tenets were proposed by Museus (2014) as a theoretical and analytical framework (see also An, 2016; Iftikar & Museus, 2018; Reyes, 2018):

1. *Asianization*: Racism is prevalent in the U.S. society, and the most salient forms of racism against Asian Americans are seeing them as perpetual foreigners, model or deviant minorities, threatening yellow perils, and hypersexualized individuals.

2. *Transnational contexts*: Both the national and international contexts and communities of practice that Asian Americans occupy form their identities, along with the ways that global economic, political, and social processes shape their identity.

3. *(Re)constructive history*: The Asian experience has been silenced in history and Asian Americans have had to transcend barriers to integrate their histories into the collective narrative in the U.S.

4. *Strategic (anti)essentialism*: Asian Americans have agency to redefine their status in society to counter the racialized generalizability that Asian ethnicities are a monolithic group.

5. *Intersectionality*: The systems of oppression (e.g., imperialism, colonialism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, etc.) exist simultaneously with a variety of individual identity markers (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation) that are integrated and negotiated within the Asian American identity.

6. *Story, theory, and praxis*: The experiential knowledge and counter stories of Asian Americans can serve to challenge marginalized and racialized stereotypes and inform theories and praxis to offer an alternative epistemology of the Asian American experience.

7. *Commitment to social justice*: AsianCrit joins the fight to eradicate injustices towards Asian Americans.

The tenets of AsianCrit further explore the lived experiences of Asian Americans to dismantle racial stereotypes (Reyes, 2018). They highlight the expanded definition of CRT and its impact on the multifaceted identities of Asian Americans, encompassing pluralistic cultural and linguistic repertoires that contribute to an individual's understanding of self. It is reported that Korean Americans are an underrepresented group within identity studies of Asian Americans (Kim & Vietze, 2023). By analyzing their counterstories through AsianCrit, this study aims to shed light on the identities of Korean Americans.

Definitions of Identity and Agency

Identity in this study draws from a poststructuralist perspective of identity posited by Norton (2016) to refer to the fluid, dynamic, and discursive construct of how people perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. From this

perspective, examining the intricate power relations inherent in individuals and communities is crucial in understanding how individuals (re)negotiate their identity. The term agency refers to the individual's capacity to exercise power, contingent upon the sociocultural context in which they are situated (Ahearn, 2001). It is not a static and unitary notion of free will or resistance, but rather it is one's capacity to exert their influences within the social, cultural, historical, political, and discursive domains of their interactions (Cho et al. 2022).

Identity Journey Mapping

As an approach used to explore AsianCrit, counterstories can identify the stereotypes and acts of racism experienced by Korean Americans and uncover how these incidences can impact their multifaceted identities and sense of belonging in multicultural spaces. In educational spaces, identity journey mapping can be a valuable tool to do so by exploring social, temporal, and spatial markers that illustrate negotiated identities of people of color (Annamma, 2018). It centers historically marginalized students' lived experiences as meaningful knowledge thereby providing students with autonomy over the maps they create and the parts of their identity they want to share with an audience (Marx, 2023).

However, there is a paucity of empirical studies that investigate how historically marginalized students produce counterstories utilizing an identity journey mapping activity. Unlike other ecological methods, such as cultural mapping (e.g., Jeannotte, 2016; Martin, 2013; Vadeboncoeur & Hanif-Shaban, 2015) that focuses on the documentation of cultural elements within a community, identity journey mapping is centered on individuals' life stories and their social identity construction. As a pedagogical tool, identity journey mapping can provide a means for deep-rooted negotiations of multifaceted identities to be expressed through print or digital works and narratives, both in written and oral forms (Flennaugh, 2016). In essence, identity journey maps are visual representations of how an individual views their identity through symbols, words, and images. Incorporating mapping activities within multicultural educational spaces grants students agency over the stories they want to share (Marx, 2023). Educators can gain valuable insights into their learners through the utilization of identity journey maps without intruding upon personal information and emphasizing cultural sensitivity among diverse populations. This study is guided by the following research questions:

(1)   How do critical moments of racialization impact the identities of Korean Americans?

(2)   In what ways do Korean American college students negotiate their racialized identity during a study abroad program?

(3)   How does an identity journey mapping activity aid in exploring Korean American students' multifaceted identities?

Research Context

English Language Teaching Internship in Korea is a faculty-led study abroad program at a public research university in the US Midwest. A total of 16 university students participated in the program over the course of 6 weeks in May-July 2023. They were enrolled in two courses, *TESOL Pedagogy* and *TESOL Practicum* (6 credit hours in total), while teaching in the secondary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. As part of their coursework, the participants created and implemented lesson plans in the Korean EFL high school classroom, following class observations of mentor teachers. Additionally, participants explored historical and natural sites in Korea through weekend excursions.

Jinsung Girls' High School (pseudonym) is located in a satellite city outside Seoul in Korea. The private all-girls high school has an approximate total enrollment of 1,200 students and employs native English-speaking teachers to help students with their conversational English skills. The study abroad participants taught English lessons in these conversational English classes (Cho & Peter, 2019). Jinsung was selected as a study abroad site due to the first author's connections, having previously worked as a secondary EFL teacher in Korean public schools as well as being an alum of a university renowned for its English language education (Cho, 2023). One of the professors from her alma mater recommended Jinsung for the study abroad site after hearing about the goals of the program.

The first author designed an identity journey mapping activity for students to express their negotiated identities that evolved during the study abroad program in Korea. For the first part of the instructions, students drew a map to illustrate their multifaceted identities in multiple physical spaces and times, including student teacher identity in the Korean EFL context. For the second part, students described the map in both written and oral forms to create the story of who they are through the visuals they draw and explanation of what they represent. The following is a description of the mapping activity from the course syllabus:

> *You will draw a map (e.g., place, time, critical events/people) about your multifaceted identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, language, religion, class, etc.), including student teacher identity in the Korean EFL context. You will be also describing the map in both written (e.g., personal narrative) and oral forms (e.g., individual interviews; small group discussions).*

By emphasizing the interplay between visual and verbal structures, as well as spatial and temporal dimensions, the researchers aimed to investigate how historically marginalized students (e.g., Korean Americans) (re)negotiate their identity in the transnational context of a study abroad program.

Researcher Positionality

Born and raised in Korea, the first author is a teacher educator and researcher at a public university in the Midwestern United States. She has been directing the study abroad program at the university for nearly 10 years (Cho & Peter, 2019). As a former EFL teacher working with Korean secondary students, she has been interested in the social identity of language learners and teachers, critical literacy, and transnational identities. Her background and position as a transnational scholar and Asian woman working in the U.S. led to initiating and conducting the study. The second author is a Filipino-American male graduate student in the field of education. He has worked with English language learners for the last 25 years. Prior to pursuing his Ph.D. studies, he taught English in Korean K-12 public schools for 5 years. This study is benefitted by both authors' backgrounds and their professional goals for preparing U.S. college students to work with diverse learners.

Methods

In the following section, we share information about the context of the study abroad program, demographics of the focal participants, and the implementation of the identity journey mapping activity. The flowchart provides key information about each step within our study, including data analysis and member checks conducted to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

Participants

Out of the 16 participants in the 2023 study abroad program, four students identified themselves as Korean American or of Korean descent. Given the sociocultural and geographical context of the study abroad program, the researchers selected these four participants for the current study because of their heritage connection to Korea. The remaining participants identified as other than Korean and were excluded from this particular study. Following approval by the university's institutional review board, the researchers invited the four students to take part in individual interviews based on their mapping activity, which was integrated into the coursework. Upon being informed of the objectives and methods of the proposed study, all of students agreed to participate in the study. Interview questions were shared with them prior to an individual interview. Table 1 provides a profile of each participant, including their ethnicity and home language.

Table 1
Participant Profiles

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Home Language	University Major	Birth Country
Alice	22	F	Pakistani Korean/ Caucasian	English	Biology	U.S.A.
Joan	22	F	Korean/ Caucasian	English	Biology	U.S.A.
Lisa	20	F	Korean	Korean/ English	English Literature	Korea
Sarah	19	F	Korean	Korean/ English	Design	U.S.A

Data Collection

The students were given supplies (e.g., poster boards, markers) to create their map, as well as permission to create their map digitally. Following the visual creation, students were instructed to write a one-page informal narrative that explained the map. After collecting the materials for the course and discussing them in small groups, the four participants were interviewed for elaboration of their maps and written narratives. To mitigate the power imbalance between the course instructor (the first author) and the study participants, the interviews were conducted by the second author, a graduate student who also participated in the study abroad program.

The interviews were semi-structured in terms of addressing three particular topics, including providing an explanation of their map design, their perception of the study abroad program, and their attitude towards the identity journey mapping activity. However, the interviews were conducted in a conversational style to allow the participants to have control in how they expounded on explanations of their chosen map designs as well as their written narratives. Due to the unique properties of each map and narrative, some questions within each interview specifically addressed the particulars of the participant's submission while being respectful and sensitive of their responses.

Three of the interviews were conducted in a private room of the shared dorm where the faculty and students stayed for the duration of the internship. The fourth interview was conducted after school in a private classroom at Jinsung. Interviews were recorded through both an online video recording platform and a phone recording application. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes. The second author

transcribed the interviews verbatim and conducted member checks of the transcriptions to clarify any misunderstandings or intentions of the participants.

The final piece of data triangulation came from field notes by the researchers who held weekly meetings during the study abroad program. Field notes included discussions held during designated class periods, groupwork observations, practicum observations, and teacher-student mentoring/coaching sessions for lesson plans. They reviewed the field notes and discussed their observations of the participants engaging with students and faculty at Jinsung.

Data Analysis

The researchers used both inductive and deductive coding (Miles et al., 2020; Thomas, 2006) to analyze the data through AsianCrit. First, each researcher read and re-read the interview transcript line by line and highlighted the words and sentences that stood out to them regarding Korean American identity. For deductive analysis, the narratives and interviews were coded based on some tenets of AsianCrit (Iftikar & Museus, 2018) to find themes between the participants' responses. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness (Stahl & King, 2020; Yin, 2015) of the transcribed interviews, the researchers provided the final draft of the article to the participants to request feedback and clarification of the report details. All their feedback was incorporated into the final manuscript (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Flowchart of Research Methods
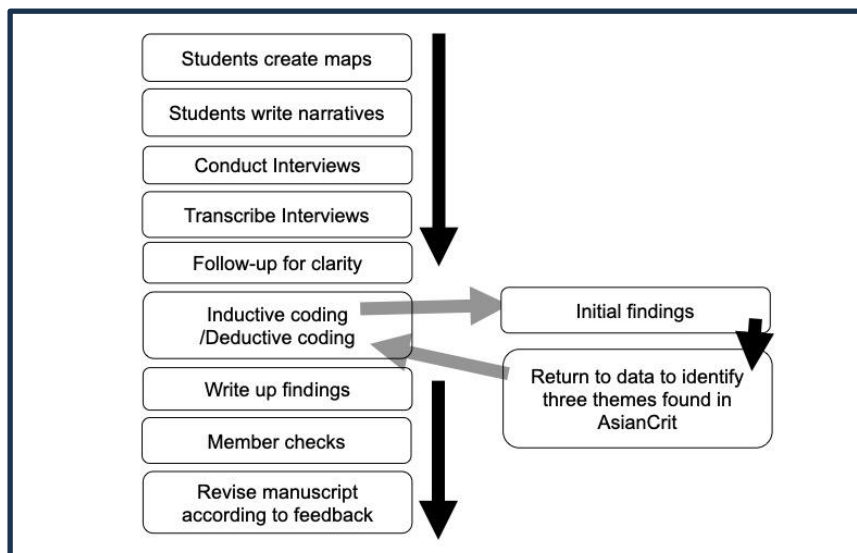
Findings

Three themes emerged from the data collected from the participants of the study, aligned with the tenets of AsianCrit. The themes were categorized with (1) *Asianization,* (2) *Transnational Identity*, and (3) *Enacting Agency*. The third theme resulted from combining the three tenets—strategic (anti)essentialism, intersectionality, and story, theory, and praxis—that shared a connection to counterstories of Korean Americans.

Asianization

The first tenet of AsianCrit interrogates the prevalence of both overt and covert forms of racism against Asian Americans (Museus, 2014). In the written narratives and interviews, the participants provided personal experiences of encountering racist comments about Koreans in the U.S., disregarding the diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences among Asian populations. Alice and Joan recounted instances when their Korean identity was questioned due to their mixed heritage and phenotypical features, such as skin color and eye shape:

> A lot that people think I'm Hispanic or Filipino, or native American. Anything except Black or white. When I do say I'm Asian, I often get invalidated that I'm only Asian because I'm part Korean, or that I'm not Asian but I'm Pakistani.
>
> (Alice, interview, June 20, 2023)

> I was at a soccer camp. I was probably like five or six years old, and my mom had picked me up. And then one of my friends [said], "I think you're adopted." I had never considered that before. I look different than my mom because my mom is white. At that point, I realized that me and my mom are very different. That was the first instance, and it went downhill with how I felt about my Korean identity. Growing up in Greenville [a pseudonym] in the Midwest, there were very few other Asian children. Almost everyone was white. I really tried to hide being Korean. I tried to emulate my peers in the way I dress. I was really embarrassed of my dad because he was Korean, and I tried to never have him be at school. I feel terrible about this now, but that was something I went through as well.
>
> (Joan, interview, June 21, 2023)

These racialized encounters caused both Alice and Joan to experience feelings of isolation from their peers, embarrassment about their physical appearance, and a lack of sense of belonging within their communities. While Alice's mixed heritage was "confusing" to others regarding her racial identity throughout her life, the assertion from Joan's friends regarding her identity as an adoptee constituted a critical incident that prompted her to confront the dissonance in her racialized identity, as depicted in her map (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Joan's Print Identity Journey Map
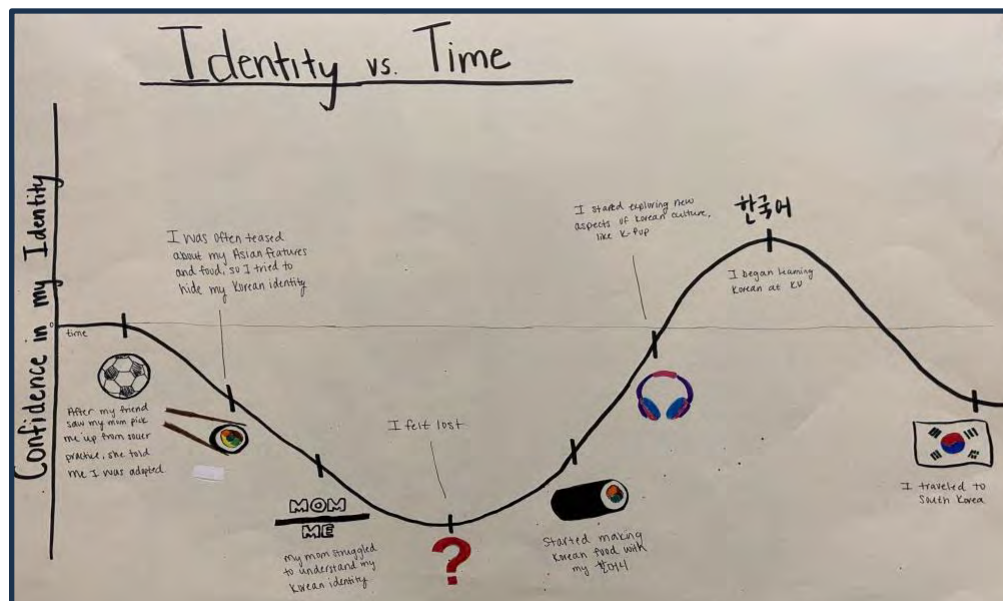
Joan's map portrayed her wavering confidence in her Korean American identity, capturing critical moments in her life. In her written narrative, she elaborated on her experience with racism, stating, "Growing up, I continued to receive racist comments about my appearance, food, or Asia in general. This made me embarrassed about my Asian identity. I tried to pretend it didn't exist" (Joan, narrative, June 20, 2023). Racist comments from others in school caused her to be reluctant to accept her Korean identity and pressured her to assimilate into the white-dominant community she was a part of while growing up in a small town in the US Midwest. Joan's map and narrative depicted the profound ways these incidences of racial discrimination significantly eroded her confidence about herself, diminishing it from the baseline level.

Similarly, Sarah shared her experience with racism throughout her K-12 schooling:

> In high school, it [racism] switched to a more malicious type of ignorance. There were teachers who genuinely racially profiled [me] at one point. And that was incredibly damaging to me because I think that was one of the few times that I had actually been like, "Wow! This isn't out of ignorance. This is out of pure malice.
>
> (Sarah, interview, June 20, 2023)

By critiquing the racist behavior of her high school teachers, Sarah articulated her frustration and anger, as these actions had a profoundly detrimental impact on her identity. She expressed that teachers' actions stemmed from a deliberate behavior of harm.

In contrast, Lisa's experiences were more subtle as she did not specifically mention any overt forms of racism from her social interactions. Instead, she

discussed the stereotypes projected onto Korean Americans and the dominant narrative about Korean Americans that is prevalent in the U.S.:

> I was socialized into being American. Some Korean etiquette culture I did not have a chance to practice. I do feel a sense to be a little bit of something that people are trying to make me into. America has a narrative of who Koreans, Korean Americans, or Asians are and what type of Asians get to do what. After hundreds of interactions, you start to think this is your place. If you want to be in America, this is part of who you're gonna have to be.
>
> (Lisa, interview, June 20, 2023)

Lisa's remarks align with previous research on the experiences of Korean Americans, emphasizing the pressure to conform to a white-dominated society as part of their socialization in the U.S., necessitating the suppression of their Korean identity (Kang, 2013). She poignantly expressed how this type of assimilation could diminish one's heritage identity, language, and culture. Fighting against racialized stereotypes to pursue interests and career paths outside the model minority rhetoric perpetuated in the U.S. context is a consistent battle that Asian Americans face, as the population continues to grow more diverse (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Lisa's narrative illustrates how the constant perpetuations of stereotypes can intensify the pressure experienced by Korean Americans.

Transnational Identity

The second tenet of AsianCrit points to the domestic and international contexts in which Asian Americans are situated. As this study was conducted in Korea during a teaching internship program, each participant developed a new understanding of their multifaceted identities while living and working in the country inherently connected to their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Throughout the internship, they constantly questioned and negotiated their transnational identity by reflecting upon their upbringing in the Midwestern U.S. while interacting with Korean students and teachers at Jinsung. Alice, for example, highlighted her multicultural family connections and the geographical locations associated with her various identity markers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Alice's Digital Identity Journey Map
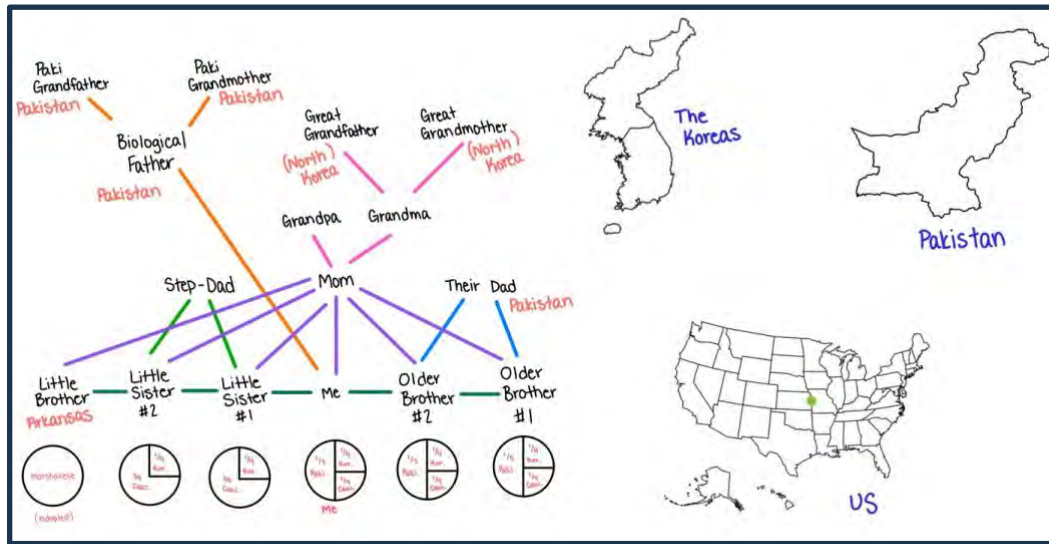
With her mother at the center of the family dynamics, Alice's map elucidated how familial connections transcend borders of the U.S., Pakistan, and two Koreas, and do not ground her within one specific geographic and sociocultural context. Despite her multiethnic and multilingual familial connections, however, Alice grew up speaking English only and never feeling firmly grounded in one racial identity. "Being both Pakistani and Korean but not growing up speaking Urdu or Korean was so hard. I didn't grow up as Muslim or Christian. We didn't have a ton of Pakistani or Korean friends" (Alice, narrative, June 20, 2023).

Similarly, Joan was questioned about her racial identity by others both in the U.S. and Korea:

> In America, I'm only seen as Asian American. But [in Korea], I'm not seen as Asian. People have asked, "Are you Colombian?" I think that's the reality of being mixed. Having experiences with Korean people asking me, "Oh, are you Korean?" makes me think about who I am. I've never experienced that [in the U.S.] and I don't have that same sense of belonging that they [Koreans in Korea] do. I don't think I ever will.
>
> (Joan, interview, June 21, 2023)

While Joan was generally perceived as Asian American in the U.S., she was not seen as Korean by the community at Jinsung because of her English native speaker identity and her physical appearance, which was different from Koreans. By navigating their hybrid identities against the backdrop of a predominantly homogenous environment at Jinsung, Joan and Alice acknowledged that their past experiences of feeling disconnected from their social groups enabled them to foster empathetic and caring relationships with their Korean students. They became cognizant of the benefits of being a transnational individual with diverse life experiences in the context of the study abroad program. As Alice noted,

"Coming from a diverse background gives me a perspective that not a lot of people have. Although I can be a little sensitive, I'm more understanding and compassionate" (Alice, interview, June 20, 2023).

Conversely, Lisa had a keen understanding of her bilingual identity in the transnational context. Lisa's map (see Figure 4) depicts the bifurcation of her identity through geographic contexts (Korea and the U.S.) and relational contexts (family and friends).

Figure 4
Lisa's Digital Identity Journey Map

The map symbolizes Lisa's navigation of her transnational identity by connecting the national flags of Korea and the U.S. The established boundaries between her perceived ethnic identity, in part due to her physical appearance and bilingual abilities (Choi, 2015), along with the wavey circles connecting them represent her ability to engage in both contexts. In her interview, Lisa problematized the gender stereotypes and assumptions of her transnational identity by firmly identifying as Korean and placing her American identity in parentheses:

> This is connected to perceived notions and constructed social narratives of who Korean Americans are. The parentheses show assumptions. It's made me realize how much more Korean I am. One of the things that helps me understand my Korean-ness is language. But I do feel a lot of times more Korean American. It's difficult sometimes to be that respectful, obedient, good young lady that Koreans might see me as. [Koreans] might be shocked by my frankness, which maybe is my American-ness.

> (Lisa, interview, June 20, 2023)

Although Lisa embraced her "Korean-ness" through her native proficiency in the Korean language, she also challenged the stereotypical portrayal of Korean young

females as "respectful" and "obedient." She acknowledged that her "American-ness" is a part of her identity, as she values her "frankness." It is argued that her transnational and intersectional identity with gendered identity enabled her to develop a critical awareness of power relations embedded in social interactions. The following section of the findings delves further into this phenomenon.

Enacting Agency

Enacting agency is a convergence of tenets within AsianCrit, including strategic (anti)essentialism, intersectionality, and story, theory, and praxis (Museus, 2014). The three concepts are connected through the cultivation and creation of identity and voice. As an interconnected concept, it aims to investigate how Asian Americans reclaim their identity against systems of racialized oppression, prejudice, and unwarranted stereotypes (Hsieh & Nguyen, 2021; Player, 2022). The amalgamation of these critical tenets was enacted through the interactions the participants had with the students, as well as their reflections of the identity journey maps. For example, Sarah immediately perceived her Korean American identity as a strength in the Korean high school context. Her physical resemblance to the students and teachers at Jinsung, coupled with her native proficiency in the target language she was teaching, led her to perceive her fully balanced bilingual abilities as a valuable aspect of her professional identity. Sarah fostered deeper connections with Korean students who were not proficient in English, bridging meaningful engagement and understanding:

> I was talking to one of the students about some hardship she was having with school life. There are words in Korean that just don't [mean] the same [in English]. I spoke to her in Korean, and she started crying. Being able to use the Korean vocabulary in talking about these Western ideals - and empathize and sympathize with the [students] in ways that they don't receive by adults. I can see the impact that I have.
>
> (Sarah, interview, June 20, 2023)

Similar to the bilingual teacher participants in Nieto's study (2017), Sarah's bilingual abilities allowed her to build a deeper emotional connection with the high school student who shared her personal struggles and hardships in her native language. From the perspective of enacting agency, it is important to recognize agency as a sociocultural construct that is negotiated, performed, and constrained within specific sociocultural contexts. Sarah's bilingual proficiency afforded her the opportunity to establish more profound connections with the students, thereby exposing them to experiences beyond their immediate Korean community. This enhanced level of interaction between high school students and Korean American college students was also observed by the researchers throughout the program. Korea high school girls would rush to find the Korean American student teachers during recess and lunch breaks, not only to practice their English language skills but also to engage in discussions about the sociocultural facets of the participants' lives.

Additionally, Joan remarked that her experience with the students and faculty allowed her increased self-acceptance to live as biracial/bicultural:

> In my college classes, I felt like I had a better understanding of systemic issues involving race than my white peers. I know how to be sensitive and respect other people because of my own experiences with ignorant comments. When I was younger, it was difficult to feel like I belonged. But now, I have the confidence to have a sense of belonging in myself. It's something that came with time. And I like not [feeling] embarrassed about being Korean.
>
> <div align="right">(Joan, interview, June 20, 2023)</div>

Despite her upbringing with disheartening feelings about her biracial identity, Joan was reclaiming her biracial identity over time by having a sense of pride in her Korean-ness and continuing to grow in her confidence. Due to her physical features that are not distinctly associated with a specific ethnicity or race, Joan has acquired insights into the experiences of individuals who may face exclusion or marginalization based on factors beyond their control. Through her perspective, she has developed an understanding of the challenges individuals may face due to stereotypes and biases related to their physical appearance. By redefining her biracial and bicultural identity with a newly developed appreciation, Joan reported that she was able to navigate the transnational spaces and interactions with more finesse than her white peers.

Similarly, Alice cultivated acceptance of her multifaceted identities, even in the absence of interactions with ethnic groups associated with her affiliations:

> I'm starting to accept my Korean heritage through this [study abroad program]. I think somehow that my unanswered questions kind of ended me up here during the study abroad. The way I cope with them is validating myself and learning Korean and learning how to make the foods, and expressing my interest in the culture, as well as doing my best to utilize speaking with people here and knowing how to fit in. I don't need to justify myself to as many people as I thought I did.
>
> <div align="right">(Alice, interview, June 20, 2023)</div>

As she gained more confidence and self-acceptance in her own multifaceted identity through her interactions with Korean students and teachers in the program, Alice was less inclined to have to explain herself when people question about her racialized identity. Recognizing the limitations in accessing answers about her family history, Alice embarked on a process of self-reconciliation. She proactively embraced her multiethnic identity by language learning, participating in cultural activities and joining special interest groups. Through these endeavors, Alice sought to enhance her understanding of her lineage and heritage. In essence, despite being a short-term study abroad program, the participants demonstrated an increased ability to negotiate their identities in a foreign country (see also Malewski et al., 2012).

Identity Journey Mapping: Benefits and Considerations

The findings reveal that the identity journey mapping activity created a time and a space for participants to share their stories in meaningful and authentic manners. All the four participants found the activity instrumental in reflecting upon their lived experiences both in the United States and Korea. In particular, Alice had the opportunity to examine her family history in chronological order through both the visual and narrative:

> [By] doing the activity, I learned more about who I am because I was able to put it into words and read it over. And I could see kind of what was missing, and I felt validated in my heritage because everything I wrote was true.
>
> (Alice, interview, June 20, 2023)

By creating an identity journey map in Korea, Alice was better able to make sense of her multifaceted identity. Alice's remarks echoed all of the other participants' insights into how they used the mapping activity as a way to control the narrative to express who they are, what impacts society and space has had on their understanding of themselves, and how they claimed agency over their identities.

As for Joan, the opportunity for self-reflection engendered a sense of clarity concerning the privileges she has been endowed with and the adversities she has surmounted:

> I've never really taken a chance to reflect over these incidences in my life that have shaped who I am. I've realized that my experience is unique and challenging because I've felt I had a sense of privilege being East Asian when it comes to being Asian American. I'm also disadvantaged in that I was not encouraged to connect with my culture. I would not be who I am at all if it weren't for these critical incidences in my life. I think that's one thing that should be considered more in the scientific world is the impact of your environment on who you are.
>
> (Joan, interview, June 21, 2023)

Joan recognized the potential utility of identity journey mapping in her field of medicine, as it would facilitate a deeper understanding of oneself, thereby enhancing individuals' capacity to empathize with others.

Similarly, the identity journey mapping assignment provided an opportunity for Sarah, as a design major, to create a visual and written narrative to not only demonstrate her identity to others but also share with her family to appreciate their impact on her identity negotiation:

> It was nice to have something that I could physically show my knowledge of myself and be forced to write it out. I don't think I would have done that otherwise. I shared part of my writing with my family because I thought I didn't give them enough credit. I don't think I show them the impact that they've had on me. I think the better understanding you have of yourself,

the better understanding you can have of others. And I think this activity does just that.

<div align="right">(Sarah, interview, June 20, 2023)</div>

Using pencils and colored markers, Sarah artistically depicted her family members (father, mother, sister, grandmother, and herself) on her map, accompanied by Korean (아빠, 엄마, 언니, 할머니) and English (Me) labels. Additionally, the inclusion of the Korean peninsula and the U.S. maps on the poster served to indicate the spatial relationships and locations of her family members. Although the inclusion of Sarah's poster was not possible in this article due to the highly realistic depiction of her family members, the artwork showcased her artistic prowess and served as a means for her to express her deep appreciation for her family and her pride as a Korean American in the transnational context.

As discussed previously, constructing identity journey mapping can be a form of counterstory as it can create knowledge by historically marginalized students (Dyke et al., 2020). However, employing identity journey mapping in the classroom warrants careful consideration. For example, while Lisa perceived the activity as valuable for voicing her perspective as a Korean American woman, distinguishing it from the typical academic tasks she encountered in her courses, she also pointed out certain drawbacks associated with the identity journey mapping activity:

> I think special consideration should be given to populations or individuals who have had very complex past experiences. Especially if this is to be used in an educational space. Although I know some education programs prepare educators with the social-emotional side of learning. [But] they are not their schools' certified psychologist. I think for educators interested in implementing this, it's a wonderful tool. But consider the context, demographics, [and] the different things you can pull from this [identity journey mapping activity].

<div align="right">(Lisa, interview, June 20, 2023)</div>

Lisa emphasized the importance of careful considerations when requesting students to engage in this task in the classroom. Such considerations are crucial for establishing ethical, thoughtful, and unintrusive objectives that avoid generalizations or undermining student voices. Failing to do so can pose a challenge for students in comprehending and completing the activity (Marx, 2023).

Discussion

There is a dearth of research that focuses specifically on exploring the experiences of Korean Americans (Kim & Vietze, 2023). This study holds promise as it explores counterstories through identity journey mapping, offering a means to confront racial discrimination and enact individual agency in the participants' Korean heritage during their study abroad experiences in Korea. The analysis of

Korean American students' work and interviews, viewed through an AsianCrit lens, reveals how home and schooling experiences, as well as the challenges associated with biracial and bicultural identity, were renegotiated as forces of self-confidence and pride in a multicultural upbringing.

The first research question explored how Korean American students' identities were impacted by critical moments of racial stereotypes or discrimination. The participants engaged in introspection and reflected upon various strategies to navigate critical instances related to their racialized identity. Some drew on family relations, while others engaged in self-explorations to gain a deeper understanding of their racialized identity. Notably, the focal participants emphasized that Korean Americans are not a monolithic group and expressed a heightened confidence in challenging the misconceptions about their Korean American identity.

The second research question explored how a transnational context facilitated the group's agency in defining themselves as Korean American and pursuing their desired self-conception, despite societal pressures and discrimination. In the cases of Joan and Alice, their self-assurance appeared to exhibit fluctuations as they actively sought a more solid grounding in their identity through social connections and cultural explorations. In contrast, Sarah and Lisa demonstrated a heightened level of confidence in interrogating the societal expectations pertaining to imposed racialized identities by others, while exerting their agency contingent on the specific context where they found themselves situated.

Finally, the identity journey mapping activity offered participants a platform to illustrate their multifaceted identities in the transnational context of a study abroad program. Each participant shared their counterstory, contesting the stereotypes associated with their racialized identity. By establishing a dedicated educational space for students to trace their unique identity journeys, this pedagogical approach reinforces its efficacy as a creative means of exploring identity negotiation within the framework of critical theory (Marx, 2023). Although the scope of the current study does not account for the long-term impact on the participants' personal and professional growth, it is evident that their immersive experience in a country tied to their heritage facilitated an exploration of their intersecting identities through reflective manners.

Nonetheless, it is essential to consider certain limitations of identity journey mapping when incorporating it into the curriculum and instruction for teachers who are working with diverse learners. It is imperative to acknowledge that, without mutual trust between teacher and students as well as among students, any attempt to force students to share their personal stories as a required component of coursework would likely prove counterproductive and potentially detrimental in student learning.

Implications and Conclusion

This study contributes to mapping in educational research by employing identity journey mapping as a deliberate course assignment in a faculty-led study abroad program. By situating the assignment within a study abroad context, identity journey mapping allows for critical self-reflection and intercultural awareness among participants in a foreign country. The findings demonstrate that teaching EFL students enables participants to reflect upon their multifaceted identities in a transnational context. Engaging students in international teaching internship programs can cultivate the knowledge and skills necessary for working with the diverse population in the United States (Cho & Peter, 2019; Malewski et al., 2012). Although this article focuses on Korean American students, all of the participants in the study abroad program reported to have experienced self-reflection through the identity journey mapping activity. As such, study abroad programs have transformative potential as they can challenge linguistic inequity and interrogate power imbalances in the globalized context (Cho & Peter 2019; Kang & Pacheco, 2021; Malewski et al., 2012). Providing students with the opportunity to live and work in a foreign country will offer valuable experiences for exploring their multifaceted identities, with the ultimate goal of promoting diversity, equity, and belonging in educational spaces and beyond.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the application of identity journey mapping can extend beyond higher education programs in the United States. Given the increasing diversity in the international educational context, the use of identity journey mapping presents an avenue for historically marginalized students to articulate their multifaceted identities within educational settings. For these diverse learners, engaging in identity journey mapping confers a sense of agency, allowing them to actively shape their narratives, rather than being silenced or misrepresented by others. Implementing and analyzing identity journey maps through a critical theoretical lens can hold the potential to unravel their intersectional identities within multicultural contexts, thereby challenging racial stereotypes and discrimination against historically marginalized groups.

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