About the Author: I grew up in a small upper-middle class town west of Chicago. The community was predominantly white and populated by growing families. I attended public schools in my community that were predominantly Caucasian as well. Roughly twenty percent of the student-body at my high school were minorities, half of which were brought here from other schools by the school-district to make my school more diverse. My group of friends were mostly Caucasian with a few other Asians like myself. Even with the other Asians in my group of friends, they were all typical teenagers. Most of the Asian students were very mainstream Americanized and socialized with non-minorities.

Soon after arriving at Champaign-Urbana, I saw a lot of differences from my life back home. Most noticeably apparent to me was the sheer number of Asians at the University and furthermore some/most of the Asians were different from my Asian friends from home. My dormitory was like a different country, a mix of India and Korea. I was placed into the dorms called Pennsylvania Avenue Residence Hall, or commonly referred to as PAR. The Asians at my "new home" were very different from my Asian friends back in the suburbs, these Asians Spoke Korean to each other and didn’t act like I did. I could tell apart these people from a moments glance. These new type of Asian were students studying abroad, or simply CY students. I guess meeting other Koreans, or more so Koreans from Korea was very interesting to me at the time. I had never really had Korean friends growing up so I was very eager to meet these new people. At first I felt a huge barrier between the “CY” students and myself. It is hard to describe how the CY students’ behavior and personality was different, but I felt out of place when I was around them. As the school-year progressed, I became closer the some of the CY students. To say that at times communicating or relating to the CY students was difficult would be an understatement. I had found during my time on campus that the CY students generally socialized with only other CY students, even though some of them had attended high school in the United States. This was interesting because my Asian friends from high school and I tried to only socialize with non-Asians.

Abstract: This project investigates whether racial identity within the Korean international student community is influenced by factors that had lead them to study in the United States. The aspect of racial identity being investigated focuses on individual’s perception of acceptance into various social networks on the University of Illinois campus. The author seeks to answer the following questions: How do people define their identity? How
does appearance, nationality, ethnicity, and environment affect identity? Why do some CY students socialize only with the CY social networks while other CY students extend into mainstream American social networks? How does economics factor into racial identity and does the "Push-Pull theory of migration" influence identity?

**Initial Exercises:**

**Question:** The primary question I would like to answer regarding CY students is their identity; Why do some CY students surround themselves with other CY students, while others surround themselves with mostly Americans (non-CY and Mainstream). How does economics factor into the equation and could it be explained by the "push-pull theory" of migration?

Initially my theory hypothesizes that CY students may seem different from international students, however because of their strong connection to the Korean culture, this counteracts all the progress they have made during their educational stay in the states. I think all the progress that CY students made in forming an identity outside of simply being a Korean person is shattered once they enter a university and again surround themselves with other Koreans.

**Plan:** Initially I had planned to interview CY students in order to understand the identity and culture of these people. My original plan was to interview several CY students and find correlations between length of stay outside of Korea and their identity. My focus has however changed directions, focusing more on the differences in CY student and International students from each other. My research and personal experience has shown that there are several groups of these students. There seems to be students who maintain their Korean ties, and those who try to expand their social groups. The new plan is to contrast several subjects; those who are very involved in the Korean social networks and others who have surrounded themselves with non-Koreans.

The research will involve asking the same type of questions to all the subjects and comparing their answers to find contrasting mentalities. The questions have been screened and arranged to focus on extracting thoughtful answers that provide insight into the subject's beliefs and personal experiences. The use of other academic research on similar topics will also be utilized to supplement the finds of the interviews.

Three research methods were utilized in this project. Using Individual interviews, group participation, and observations, as well as referring to academic sources. I proceeded with this project in the hopes that it could
provide a more conclusive explanation of racial identity.

Among the several students that I interviewed, most of them were people that I have previously known and had created close relationships with. I have found that interviewing former acquaintances allowed me to get more honest and intimate responses. I was able to ask deeper and more personal questions that would be more useful to me in my project. I focused my subject pool to students who were born in Korea but attended school in the United States. The amount of education in the United States varied between individuals. Some students I interviewed attended private school in the United States since middle school, while others had just started studying in the United States.

Data: Subject A

First came to the united states one year ago as a freshman. When he was 17 years old. Came to the US to study astronomy, there was no place to study astronomy in Korea. He later changed his major to electrical engineering. Changed major because there are no jobs for astronomy majors. Studying English was an aspect of coming to the US. The parents wanted him to come to the US, but they didn’t force him, they just bothered him about it. He wanted to come to the US when he was a kid, but as he grew up he wanted to stay in korea. His life in the US is great this year, but he didn’t like the US last year because he had no friends. There a also an aspect of culture shock. People are so different in the US. In korea he can be more honest and open to other people, but the people in the US are very distant, just say hi and small talk. There is not deep conversations. He also didn’t like the Korean food. English was a problem for him. When he first came to the US at ohare airports. He was supposed to take the bus to Uofl but he couldn’t understand the people at the airports. He asked a person for directions and he couldn’t understand a word. His English improved. He does not have a lot of white american friends, but a few(2). His regrets, he misses Korean and his friends. He would rather be in korea because of his friends. Most of his HS friends stayed in korea. He went to HS in korea. His toughest moment was his first day in american and school. He was worried about becoming discriminated before coming to the US. He heard that there was discrimination between whites and blacks. He would recommend people to come to the US if they are outgoing, but if not, just stay in Korea. It is hard to make friend in the US because of English. He would send his kids to the US. He wants his kids to grow up in the US. He made an effort to mean non Koreans. He didn’t go to a Korean church so he joined an american one. He wanted to improve his English and he didn’t want to go to a Korean church because he would not improve his English if he hung
around Koreans. He doesn’t like Korean people from Korea. They are violent and rude people. They swear a lot. He does not contribute to class, partly because of his English problem, 30% ish from English. He finds it hard to speak in public. Second generation Koreans and international Koreans are totally different. 2nd G Koreans think and are American, while he is Korean. 1.5 generation depends on when they came to the US. If they came to us before 10, then they usually end up into 2nd G Koreans. He plans to attend graduate school at UofI, after school he would like to work and live in the US. He would like to get a US citizenship but it is not that important. He tries to make as many non-Korean friends, but he need Korean friends or he would not survive here. He needs somebody to talk to in Korean. He is familiar with the term FOB and twinkie. He has thought about being an American in the past, but not as much anymore, he is unsure. If he approached a group that looked Korean he would approach them in English.

Subject B

First came to the US January 4th 2007. at the age of 25. been in the US almost 10 months. He had the choice of UK and US. US English is more prevalent around the world. The world uses US English over UK English. Parents didn’t force him to come to the US, but his brother did. He is happy with his life in the US. No regrets of coming to the US. But he misses his family and friends. Everything was worth the journey. Experiencing American culture and other people was defiantly worth it. The toughest part of being in the US was the communication barriers. He has not really felt racism, however he felt that his poor English caused people to ignore him and look down on him. He would recommend his friends come to the US and study as well. He would send his kids to study and experience living in a different country. His participation in class has been “so-so”, the reason may be his shame of not being able to speak English well. He has more Korean and Asian friends than Americans. Actually he does not have any close American friends. He does wish he had American friends, but it is very difficult to make them. He has 10-15 close Korean friends. Differences between 2nd generation and international student are their customs and lifestyle. The 1.5 generation are almost the same as the 2nd generation, even though they can speak Korean and had lived in Korea, they have changed into Americans. He spends most of his time with other Korean people. He has MSN and Cyworld to communicate with other Koreans around the world. He does not plan on living in the US, plan to go back to Korea to work and live. He is more favorable to Koreans, he is more comfortable around them, the culture and language is the same. He is the same as all the other CY students elsewhere. He attended private school in Korea.
Subject C/ Group member

i was born in korea. came to the states when i was 1. lived with my family in the states for 10 years. went back to korea. stayed there until middle school.
i came to the states alone since middle school.

i choose USA because ive lived there most of my life, and i had hard time getting along in korean schools.

when i first came to korea, i didnt know any korean. after about 3 years, ive learned korean a lot but started to lose my english.
i didn't want to lose my englsih because english was so important in korea.

first, it was all about my parent who wanted to send me back to the states so can study harder. at first i was scared, but in the other hand i thought it was a chance to "grow up".

i am happy because im free in college. middle school and high school was a nightmare though. i am satisfied with my life in the states and never regreted coming.

i do not regret. i think i wouldnt have done better in korea.

yes.

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being homesick. missing my family and friend. harsh gaurdians.

i felt discriminated in places i homestayed because i was always left out with the family. also at school ive been through racism.

yes.

if they are ready to go through hell, yes.

yes and no. i like the education in the states, but i dont like the lifestyle.

i want to obey my childrens thoughts. i would send them wherever they want with a reasonable explanation.

i actively participate in classes i enjoy. classes i dislike is too hard for me to focus on.
i have more korean friends.

americans and koreans. doesnt matter, but its always easier to talk with a korean.

i have a couple close american friends that i really like. what kind of friends are “easy to make”?

i have a couple close koreans friends also.

i have a couple of close korean-american friends.

they have different interests. they cant make a long conversation. the way they hang out is different.

koreans.

koreans. some korean-americans.

i plan on staying in the states or going to a different country. i dont have any thoughts of living in korea.

(page 3)

koreans because i have more common things to talk about in conversations.

special.. hmm..

i love art? in uiuc its hard to find people with similar taste like me? (movies, music, books)

"why the hell does those white people think they're better than me?"

"i gotta try harder to survive in this place"

i attended a public high school with about 10 koreans. because of some korean friends, i studied harder in high school.

yes.

never.

im not great at speaking english but i understand everything. im comfortable speaking it with friends, but not with professors/adults.
Discussions:

I was initially interested in exploring the general premise of racial identity. Through the process of researching and thinking of my project, I have found that racial identity is not as simple to define or explain as I had initially thought. I have come to find that there are possibly a hundred factors that can influence racial identity, especially given the wide range of people with different life backgrounds. My narrowed down research focused on chokiyukagseng (CY) students. The factors in question concerning racial identity was appearance, class issues, Push-Pull migration, and the social environment. It is very reasonable to conclude that more than the factors listed can significantly affect the development or redevelopment of racial identity. To be honest I became more confused about the topic as I conducted more research. My initial hypothesis concerning identity in CY students focused on the Push-Pull theory of migration.

The theory stated that in any case of migration, there are two factors that initiate the migration movement. There is a Push factor that provided reasons for a person to be dissatisfied with their current location. A Pull factor provided traits that make the intended destination seem more desirable or appealing. In the case of CY students, the most probable Push-Pull factor involved the Korean education system. Some students found the Korean education system flawed and was influenced by a pushed factor. On the other hand some students were influence by a pull factor to study abroad. These people saw an opportunity to study in another country appealing and wanted to experience different cultures. My initial theory was that the two Push-Pull factors influence racial identity among CY students the most. Although the initial premise of my theory still holds valid, further research found that class issues and environmental conditions could influence identity more than previously thought. An alteration to the original thesis was developed; All the previously mentioned factors could all be subsidiaries of one larger factor, Economics.

My first and third interviews clarified and vindicated my initial theory concerning the Push-Pull theory of Migration. The two subjects were both students at the University, however each had their own reasons for coming to the United States to study. Subject A, attended high school in Korea and decided to study in the United States in order to experience western culture and the American education. Subject C was in a way forced to come study in the United States. His parents were the ones that suggested subject C study in the United States. The parents didn’t think he would be able to succeed in the Korean education system.
Accordingly, subject A who wanted to experience western cultures was influenced by a Pull factor. Subject C who was forced to come to the United States to study was influenced by a push factor from the Korean Education system. It was interesting to find that the two subjects had very different opinions of their identity. Subject A, who was pulled to the US to study had a different identity and mentality as subject C who was pushed to study in the US. Subjects A was found to be in mainly non-CY social networks. The majority of his friends were Asian-Americans or other non-foreigners. A similar pattern was found in other subjects in similar studies by other researchers. Another researcher conducted a study on how international students at Illinois State University adapted socially and academically. Their results seemed to be consistent to my findings about Pull based international students. Two subjects in particular best illustrated how Pull based international students identified themselves and networked differently. In the ISU study, a subject named Tom was described as an international student from the Middle East. Tom came to the United States to study for two main reasons; a college degree from an American university is valid anywhere in the world and he wanted to study in a country free of political and economic problems. It was noted that Tom had made the decision to study in the United States himself and that his family supported him. Essentially Tom decided to study in the United States by Pull factors. A key excerpt from the research shows Tom’s opinion about his level of adapting into society and his activities on campus.

“I do not fell fully adapted although I’ve been here for almost seven years now. The question for me is how to balance my life in this society. Well if you ask one of my friends they would say that I am fully adapted to this kind of life but underneath the surface the process of adapting is far from over. This gap between my society and America is hard to bridge and I do not know if it is even possible. I guess it is a struggle for me to find my identity.”

The previous excerpt indicated that Tom is trying to fully adapt into society, even though he does not feel like he has adapted enough. It shows that Tom is struggling with his identity and trying to balance the different aspects of his life. Another subject in the ISU study was Mike from Algeria, Northern Africa. Mike had chose to study in the United States because he always wanted to study in America and because his uncle who lived in the United States kept trying to convince him to come to America to study. In Mike’s case, he was interested in studying abroad and he was literally pulled to study in ISU by his uncle’s persuasion. While he was a student on campus, Mike made friends from around the world. He had roommates from Turkey, Japan, Bulgaria, Iran, and Mexico, all of whom became good friends with him. Mikes social networks included people across the globe. In contrast to the situations and social
networking of Pull based international students, the push factor subject in my research had very different social networks and identity issues. Subject C in my research was forced to study in the United States by his parents who were worried he would not succeed in Korea. This person was essentially pushed away from Korea by the lack of opportunities to succeed in their country and the country’s education system. Subject C had a social network that included only other CY students and Korean Students. His perception of other non-Korean students was less favorable. He restricted himself into only the Korean social networks and was not active on the campus. My theory concerning the differences in the social networks, the identity of Pull based and Push based international students could be explained by their differences in mentality. Pull based international students arrive to school with an expectation to meet new people and learn about other cultures. Push based international students however seem to be simply trying to escape their current location. In doing so, push based students do not arrive at school with expectations of expanding their experiences. The students are rather trying to escape from their negative origins, thus they see no reason to establish social networks outside of their own.

Appearances and class issues which at first was not a focus of my research seemed to have a larger influence on racial identity than previously thought. Based on Anona Whitley’s research on Korean American Aesthetics and Style, Fashion (clothing and hairstyle) play a crucial role in the development of racial identity in the use of labels like Koreans, Korean-Americans, and Asian-American. Anona Whitley used a series of interviews with subjects who were self-described “FOBS”, “Korean-Americans”, or simply “Americans”. The research conducted by Anona focused on interviewing two subjects, one who was a self-described FOB and another who was considered self an American. Although the perspective of the two subjects were different (FOB vs. Whitewashed) there was a general consensus that style influences racial identity, or vice versa. The importance of which influences what will not be addressed and is out of the scope of this research project. First I believe it is important to create some context into the dynamic and relationship between the two groups, FOB and Whitewashed. An excerpt from the FOB subject’s interview might provide the best context of the study.

“…but there’s a more deeper difference just than what we wear. I -this is my personal opinion- I feel really uncomfortable to hang out with real Korean Americans, because we are so different. Even though we’re all Asian. For me, if I talk to Korean Americans I don’t feel like talking with a
Korean person.”

In this context, we are detailing the dynamics between clothing, racial sub-group identity, and behavior. Based on the interview with the FOB, Wayne, Korean-Americans have style standards similar to Americans; muscular body and fraternity style dressing. Before even addressing style, a more basic difference between FOB and Korean-Americans can be seen in the ideal body type. For Korean-Americans, having a muscular body is desired compared to FOB/Koreans who prefer being Skinny. As suggested by Wayne, pop culture could be playing a large role in the ideal body type differences. Korean-Americans who are raised in mainstream American culture, view American ideal body types as their own. On the other hand, FOBS and Koreans who follow the pop culture in Korea are consistent with their belief of ideal body type being skinny. According to the interview with the Korean-American girl, she brought up the issue of different set styles between the two groups and also the expectation of appearance. The issue of when it is appropriate to dress up and to what degree was an element of discussion in the interview. The Korean-American girl, Michelle, stated that Korean guys always wear beanies (hats) even in the summer and Koreans always dress up even for mundane activities like running errands. In contrast, Korean-Americans have a more casual style like sweatpants and T-shirts for daily activities. The difference in the culture of Koreans and Korean-Americans was also interesting to develop throughout the interview. In Korean culture, people are constantly judged based on their appearance, thus Koreans are always dressed up and this style culture could also explain why Koreans are preoccupied with designer brands. The culture of designer brands in Korea also brings up a great topic of class issue. The correlation between class status and style could be established based on the two interviews of Anona. In my opinion, the correlation between class status and style has little connection with the development of racial identity. I think the more important factor is whether style correlates to identity. I has been established that individuals who dress along predetermined style guidelines generally tend to identify themselves into that given racial identity group. It might be able to infer that style, how people view their appearance, is an indicator of a determined identity.

The analysis of racial identity within the Korean community into several sub-groups has shown that there is possibly racism with a racial group. This finding is consistent with Stacey Lee’s research titled, “What’s in a Name? Asian American Identities at Academic High School.” An afterthought I have considered to ask was why there has to be a racial identity. In line with you Kuyng Kang’s research as well as Edelmira Garcia’s findings, racial identities and exclusive social networks (CY networks) exist because people seek acceptance and membership into to
group in which people can share similar experiences and cultural background in order to deal with injustices and hardship they experience.

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Reflect:  Throughout the process of my research I have continuously revised and altered my thesis. At the conclusion of my research my final thesis reflects my understanding of the complexity of categorizing identity. In a sense identity is fluid, it can be shaped and re-shaped given any environment. The conditions leading to a person’s decision to study abroad was found to heavily influence identity. Some came to escape hardship, but all the subjects wanted to become more successful. Appearances and class issues (Money) was also found to influence identity. FOBS dressed according to their perception that appearance reflected social status. The cultural perception of ideal appearance (physical and style) was found to be different between the FOB and Korean-American groups. I have found that in all the discussed factors that influence identity, Money seemed to be at the heart of each issue. This had lead be to surmise that identity is purely economics.