

Afinewsletter

AFIN nº 48

March 2012



In March 2009 the first AFIN publication saw the light of day as an space for reflection and communication about the issues on which the Afin Research Group works. Four years and forty-eight issues later, this free monthly publication reaches over 30,000 subscribers and it is available via Internet in three versions [Spanish](#), [Catalan](#) and [English](#).

This time, we have had the collaboration of Gina Bacon, a woman born in Korea and adopted by an American family whose presentation in the VI International Congress AFIN (held last November), sparked enormous interest among

the audience. It draws her reflections on what transracial adoption has meant to her and the tension between her "yellow" appearance and her "white" inside.

We face the fifth year of this publication with renewed eagerness and the start of a new R & D project. We hope you will continue to be with us.

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ISSN: 2013-2956

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The life of a “twinkie:” Performing race as a Korean adoptee

Twinkies are spongy yellow cakes with white creamy frosting in the middle. They are one of America’s iconic treats and can even be found in the United States’ millennium time capsule (selected by former President Bill Clinton). Twinkies are made by Hostess, a company that has recently gone bankrupt. I do not like eating twinkies, but U.S. citizens started paying hundreds of dollars for them when Hostess was no longer in business. Perhaps the appeal comes from the spongy texture or the rumor that twinkies can survive a nuclear holocaust. Whatever the reason, America loves them and I hate them. Strange, perhaps, that I self-proclaim myself as one of them – a twinkie. Yes, I identify myself as an unhealthy dessert that I personally hate eating. Why? Because similar to twinkies, I am white on the inside and yellow on the outside.

In 2008, I wrote The life of a “twinkie:” Performing race as a Korean adoptee. I have condensed this paper into the below article. It has been several years since I wrote The life of a “twinkie” and it always seems to find its way back into my life. Please note that I do not wish to generalize or stereotype transracial adoptees. My story is only one of many, but as my “twinkie” status spreads, my connection to people grows stronger. If the twinkie ever comes back from bankruptcy, I hope you will have the chance to eat one and think that it’s delicious. Then perhaps you can add to my belief that being yellow on the outside and white on the inside is a perfectly good combination.



Twinkie: A golden coloured small sponge cake with a [white] creamy filling. (Word Web Online).

I am what some may call a twinkie; yellow on the outside, white on the inside. Generally meant as a derogatory racial term, I think of it as an accurate description. I am just below five feet tall, have brown skin, black hair, and dark brown eyes. I look about as Asian as one can get. I would say that my height (or lack of height) came from my dad and thick black hair from my mom, but my dad is six feet tall and my mom has fine, medium brown hair. They are both (Cauc)Asian.

My parents' race differs from my own. My exterior is like a small yellow sponge cake, soaking up the American culture that surrounds me. My interior is white, like the cream that makes a twinkie distinct and full of flavor, but is never actually seen from the outside. Both parts never mix and block each other from being one solid color. In other words, my "yellow" body gets in the way of my "white" experience. At the same time, my "white" inside does not allow me to be fully "yellow." Words

like minority, oppression, and marginalization are used to describe my Asian body. Privilege, patriarchy, and dominance describe my White inside.

Most people recognize that race is not biological but rather a social construct. Yet, we cannot deny that race plays a significant part of our self-concept because we live in a "race conscious society" (Fogg-Davis, 2002). After all, almost every survey has race boxes to check. It is almost metaphorical. By checking the box, you are being put into a box. You

Select One:

- Caucasian
(privileged, ideal)
- Black-American
(criminal, ghetto)
- American Indian
(alcoholic, spiritual)
- Asian American
(martial arts master, studios)
- Hispanic American
(lazy, illegal)
- Other/Unknown
(un-recognized, un- important)

are marking who you are, where you come from, and where you stand in society. So what box do I check? I check the Asian American box, but feel like I fit better in the Caucasian box. Yet, I can't check the Caucasian box because I am Korean. So, I should really check the "Other" box because I do not fit into any other racial category.

Korean adoptees share a unique experience that most do not and cannot understand. Within ourselves, we all have different stories and so while I can't speak for any other Korean adoptee, I write to raise awareness, identify with others, and to explore and challenge the connotations of "race," "identity" and "stereotype." I believe that people's identities are fluid and constantly being performed. We act differently as a teacher, friend, employee, daughter, etc. Throughout this essay, I examine how I perform race in a society that assumes race signifies culture, and how people react to and/or reject my racial performances.

Noh more Korea: How I became “twinkified”

Noh, Eun Joo was born in Seoul, South Korea. She was the oldest among one boy and one girl. At 18 years old, she attended high school as a third grader, similar to being a senior in the United States. On May 5, 1986, Eun Joo’s life changed forever; she gave birth to a baby girl. However, she felt she could not raise her baby normally as a young and unmarried student. She thought her baby “had better be adopted to a good family for the sake of her baby’s future.” So, on May 8, 1986, Eun Joo never saw her baby girl again.

I am the baby girl that Eun Joo gave up for adoption. The only information I have about my birthmother and father is what is written in my adoption papers. My birthmother was 18 years old when she gave birth to me. At the time, she was “composed and of medium build. She [was] thin

and cute. She [had] a round face.” There is no information about my birthfather. I will never know about the physical characteristics passed on to me beyond the un-detailed description of my birthmom. Though her genetic attributes are unknown, she did give me a name. Though names are merely symbolic, they carry significant meaning for people’s identity. In theatre, actors play different people all the time. I started acting when I was 13 and have never played, “Gina” as a character. I always have a different name and portray a different person on stage.

Similar to playing various characters, I perform a different person as Gina Renae Bacon than the name given to me at birth, Noh Hyeong Kyeong. Hyeong speaks Korean and was raised in Korean culture. She is Asian. Gina lives in the United States. She speaks English and was raised by her Caucasian family. The disconnect between my Asian and White selves creates my



At my graduation from Western Washington University.

“twinkie” status. They’re both me, so I try to perform both Asian and White. But, what performance is the most accepted?

Twinkie in the making: Discovering race

As a child, I didn't see myself as Asian; I did not know what Asian was. Yet, I have many childhood memories that made me realize I was different from the white population around me. Remembering my childhood informs how I performed race (or was forced to perform) before even knowing what race was. I will share one of the clearest memories I have growing up as one of the only non-white children in school.



Me as a child (with a round face).

During my Kindergarten year at recess, four to five boys pinned me against a brick wall. I was unable to push past them and they started yelling things at me. I remember crying and hoping that one of my classmates would help me. Eventually I was let go and went home to tell my family about what those boys did and said to me. Much to my surprise, my parents did not seem upset. I shared my hurt feelings and my family did not share my pain. I will never forget that day.

I will never forget that the boys pinned me to a wall, but have no recollection of what they actually said to me. As an adult, my mom later told me what happened and explained that I was not upset by their physical actions, but rather their words. The boys said, "You have a round face" over and over. They looked at my body and vocalized what they found. My family did not have a big reaction because the statements that hurt me so much were true. They reminded me that I

do have a round face. My parents did not want me to feel ashamed of that. Their casual reaction was to help me realize that the boy's "insults" were not insults at all. I remember being confused because I expected them to feel sorry for me. Now I am grateful for their calm reaction and understand why they did not validate my hurt feelings. I did have a round face. There is nothing hurtful about that. Yet, if the boys just vocalized a true statement about my physical body, why did I cry? Because they pointed out my physical difference like I was a freak, ugly and unnatural. I would never look like them.

Yellow sponge cake in a white creamy world: (Un)able to perform White

I do not feel different from my peers until I cannot perform like my peers. My inability to perform white happens when I look at a photograph or see myself in a mirror. My Asian body puts me in the kid's section at the shoe store and forces me to realize that I am not like my friends. My friends are tall, have eyelids, and do not have to stand on a chair to reach the high cupboards. Participants of Freundlich and Lieberthal's (2000) study of adult Korean adoptees made comments like, "I felt that I wasn't pretty because I didn't meet the Western ideal of beauty." "I did not consider myself attractive because I was not Caucasian." To find beauty in my short brown body, small brown eyes, and plain black hair while being surrounded by beautiful white women is a difficult task. Well, supposedly Asian women are stereotyped as exotic and submissive, yet I

cannot even be those because I grew up in the United States, in a culture that aims for equality and individualism.

White cream flavors the yellow sponge cake: (Un)able to perform Asian

People look at my body and assume that I have Asian parents and can speak a different language. I cannot be offended because it might be strange to assume every person of color is adopted. Yet, my inability to perform Korean should not be cause for guilt or shame as it often is. People expect me to be Asian, but I do not meet their expectations. I met a Korean woman who, upon hearing that I did not speak Korean said, "Shame on you!" An older gentleman at my parent's church saw me and said, "Ni hau." I asked for a fork at a Vietnamese restaurant and the waitress gave me a dirty look and said, "I thought you were the Asian one" with disdain. These interactions



*At a Japanese restaurant with chopsticks
(no fork for me).*

occur almost weekly. I simply cannot perform Asian.

My knowledge of Korean culture comes from school projects and the internet. I cannot pronounce my own Korean name. I am "white-washed." I am looked down upon. I am a twinkie that

cannot be fully Asian, whatever being Asian means. But, I still try to embrace my yellow exterior. I still try to make my performance believable.

**Yellow sponge cake hides white cream:
Embodying stereotypes**

When I embody Asian stereotypes, I feel more Asian. I live up to the studious stereotype and always received good grades in school. I've been told, "Well, it's because you're Asian!" I realize that the smart-Asian stereotype comes largely from Asian cultures, but

My brother's green Tiburon.



unless there's a "good grade" gene, I did not receive good grades because I am Asian; I got them from hard work. Yet, I feel like more of a legitimate Asian person because of them. I embrace stereotypes because they make me like I belong. I find myself trying to perform yellow, while I simultaneously attempt to hide my white inside.

My brother used to drive a sleek, green Tiburon car. He painted red dragons on the sides and flames on the hood. It looked like a street racing car you'd see in a movie. All racism aside, it looked pretty Asian. My white brother does not necessarily look like the type to drive such an "Asian" looking vehicle. I, on the other hand, do. We traded cars for a month and driving the Tiburon honestly made me feel more Asian. At times I hoped to drive past another Asian person just to show that "hey, I'm Asian too." For some reason, putting my physical body in the driver's seat of that car made me feel like I could belong.



Asian.



Not-Asian

Physical accessories like cars, clothing, and hairstyles influence readings of my body, which in turn influences my perception about my racial identity. I had straight bangs once and my friends said that I looked really Asian. Did I not look Asian before? People look at me and think that I am Asian regardless of my hairstyle. Yet, to my friends who think of me as just like them, my bangs suddenly turned into a reminder that Gina is different.

**Ingredients-yellow cake and white cream:
Performing and embracing “twinkie”**

I identify with my Korean blood by creating an Asian appearance and embodying Asian stereotypes. However, I fall short due to my white inside. I perform white and Asian, but both are not accepted. I look too Asian to be white, but I do not act “yellow” enough to be Asian. My inability to be one or the other only solidifies my position as both.

I was born in South Korea and am proud of my heritage. I live in the United States and am proud of my white family. I fully support adopted children who visit their birth country, learn about the culture and embrace their birthplace. Yet, they should not feel shame for not embodying another culture. Children are cultural beings of where they were raised. Though born in South Korea, I should not feel guilty for not knowing the language or culture.

Writing about my racial experiences does not end in a distinct conclusion about society, racism, stereotypes or identity. But, the journey of this paper raises awareness about the disconnect between skin color and culture. My white upbringing and Asian exterior make me unique. Though my friends can buy clothes that fit, eat with forks, and have their parent’s physical characteristics...I can easily tan, buy cheap kid shoes, and have the most loving family I could ever ask for. I am a twinkie and do not want to be anything else. Society has a difficult time accepting my “yellow” outside and “white” inside as a package, but through giving my “twinkified” body a voice, individuals may re-think the way we label people of color.



Courtesy of corporatevoices.wordpress.com.

...FURTHER READING

Freundlich, M. and Lieberthal, J.K (2000). [*The Gathering of the First Generation of Adult Korean Adoptees: Adoptees' Perceptions of International Adoption*](#). The Evan B. Donald Adoption Institute.

At this First International Gathering of Korean Adoptees, adults who had been adopted from Korea between 1956 and 1985 met other Korean adoptees, discussed their adoption experiences, explored together issues of culture and ethnicity, and connected with their Korean heritage. Their voices offer adoption professionals and adoptive parents a remarkable opportunity for learning and for improving international adoption practice in the future.



Nixon, R. (2009, 8th Nov.). [*Adopted from Korea and in Search of Identity*](#). *The NY Times*.

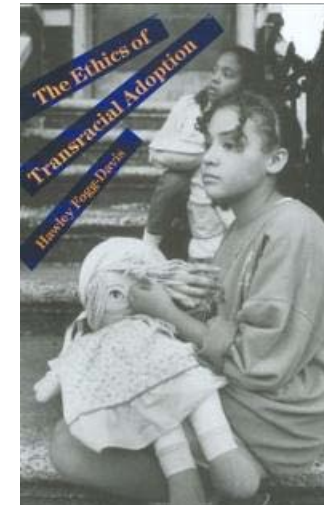
This article shows the process from identification with white parents, the subsequent acquisition of awareness of difference, and the road to discovery-and-construction of their identity, through the experience of Kim Eun Mi Young, a woman born in South Korea and adopted by an American family.



Saulny, S. (2011, October 12).

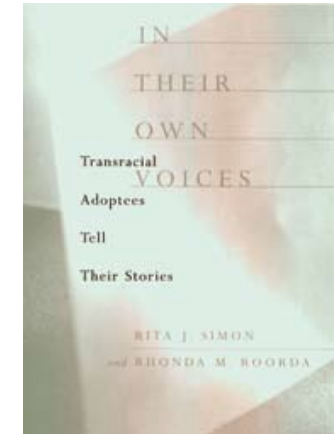
[*In Strangers' Glances at Family, Tensions Linger*](#). *The New York Times*.

This article shows a view from the Greenwood family experience, how to be a multiracial family in America.



Fogg-Davis, H. (2002). [*The Ethics of Transracial Adoption*](#). New York: Cornell University Press.

This book breaks new ground in the debate over transracial adoption by examining the relationship between personal and public conceptions of race and racism, before, during and after adoption.



Simon, R.J. & Roorda, R.M. (2000). [*In Their Own Voices: Transracial Adoptees Tell Their Stories*](#). New York: Columbia University Press.

This book present the personal stories of two dozen black and biracial young adults who were adopted by white parents. How does the experience affect their racial and social identities, their choice of friends and marital partners, and their lifestyles?

...FURTHER VIEWING

[Somewhere Between](#)

Directed by Linda Goldstein Knowlton. USA, 2011. 88 min.

A documentary on four teenage girls living in different parts of the US and united by one thing: all four were adopted from China due to family situations colliding with the country's "One Child Policy".

[Operation Babylift: The Lost Children of Vietnam](#)

Directed by Tammy Nguyen. USA, 2009. 72 min.

Over 2,500 Vietnamese orphans were airlifted out of Vietnam after the war and adopted by American families. Nearly 35 years later, this documentary uncovers the "lost" stories of these adoptees and who they have become as adults.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gina Bacon discovered her twinkie identity at Western Washington University where she received her Bachelor's Degree in Communication. Her professors strongly supported her creativity and scholarship, which led her to receive her Master's Degree at the University of Utah. Gina currently works as a Program Coordinator in the Dean's Office of the University of Utah School of Medicine.

Gina is forever grateful to Noh Eun Joo, whose bravery led her to Theresa and Richard Bacon. She is incredibly blessed to have such loving and encouraging parents. Gina will continue to share her twinkie story as long as people are interested. Even if the twinkie dessert does not get redistributed by another company, she will be out there carrying on the name.

RECOMMENDED

From "children of the heart" to "abandoned children": the construction of "the origins" in Spanish adoption. San Román, B. (2013). *Papeles del Psicólogo*, vol. 34(1).

Discourses on adoption constitute a repertoire for adoptive families and adoptees which interpellates them and in relation to which they negotiate the meaning of adoption in their life trajectories and identities. This article examines how the notion of origins in adoption has been built in Spain, from silencing them to the penetration of the discourse that considers "abandonment" as an inescapable fact in the adoptees's lives. Finally, the implications of the latter are discussed.

[Spanish version](#)

The English version will be soon available at [Papeles del Psicólogo](#)

LINKS

[Evan B. Donaldson
Adoption Institute](#)

[Holt International
Children's Services](#)

[International Korean
Adoptee Associations](#)

FUTURE EVENTS

[Les économies politiques des sentiments.](#) Espace Eve. Le Mans, France, Salle des artistes, Paris, Francia, from 13th of February to 12th June 2013.

[Youth 2.0: connecting, sharing and empowering? Affordances, uses and risks of social media.](#) Antwerp, Belgium, from 20th to 22nd March 2013.

[The Child and the Book Conference: Children's Literature, Technology and Imagination. Research, Problems and Perspectives.](#) Padua, Italy, from 21st to 23rd March 2013.

[Psychoanalysis and politics. Eruptions, disruptions and returns of the repressed.](#) Helsinki, Finland, from 15th to 17th March 2013.

[Colloque Corps Femmes Contraintes Sociales.](#) Université du Maine -

CONFERENCES

Espace Eve. Le Mans, France, from 28th to 29th March 2013.

[Rutgers Media Studies Conference: Extending Play.](#) New Brunswick, USA, from 19th to 20th April 2013.

[Produire du savoir, gouverner des populations.](#) Lyon, France, from 10th to 13th September 2013. Contact: colloquehssa@gmail.com.

[Il encuentro internacional en Marruecos con menores en contextos de riesgo.](#) Tetúan. Moroco. From 15th to 20th of April 2013. Registration deadline: 15th of March.

[Philosophy at Play conference. Gloucestershire.](#) Gloucestershire, GB. From 9th to 10th of April 2013.

[Conferencia internacional sobre protección de la infancia.](#) Monaco. 5th April 2013.

[New Agendas on Youth and Young Adulthood: Youth Studies Conference 2013.](#) Glasgow, GB. From 8th to 10th April 2013.

[37th Annual Child Welfare Symposium.](#) The Conference Center, New York, USA. From 20th to 22nd May 2013.

[Reproductive Justice: Activists, Advocates, and Academics.](#) Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. From 29th May to 1st June 2013.

[4ICAR. Four International Conference on Adoption Research.](#) Bilbao, Spain. From 7th to 11th July 2013.

CALL FOR PAPERS

[12th Conference 'European Culture': Encounters with difference in European borderlands.](#) From 24th to 26th October 2013, Barcelona. Deadline Call for papers: 20th March. Contacts: Bas Spierings b.spierings@uu.nl; Martin van der Velde m.vandervelde@ru.nl

[New Agendas on Youth and Young Adulthood: Youth Studies Conference, 2013.](#) From 8th to 10th April 2013.

[Encounters and Engagements: Creating New Agendas for Medical Anthropology. EASA Medical Anthropology Network / AAA Society for Medical Anthropology.](#) Tarragona, Spain, from 12th to 15th June 2013. [Call for papers.](#)

[Periferias, fronteras y diálogos. XIII Congreso de Antropología de la FAAEE.](#) Tarragona, Spain, from 12th to 15th June 2013. Call for papers: 30th March.

[Body and construction of age categories: from childhood to adolescence.](#) Strasbourg-Meltz, France, from 18th to 20th September 2013. Call for papers: 20th March. Contacts: Nicoletta Diasio (nicoletta.diasio@misha.fr) and Virginie Vinel (vinel5@univ-lorraine.fr).

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

[Les usages du politique et leurs enjeux dans les pratiques artistiques et expressions esthétiques.](#) Call for papers: 21st April 2013. Contacts: laure.garrabe@mshparisnord.fr; veronique.muscianisi@mshparisnord.fr

[Special Issue of Childhood: Education, Childhood and Disability in Countries of the South: Re-positioning the Debates.](#) Deadline Call for proposals: 1st May 2013.

[An Online Feminist Journal.](#) Deadline: 31st May 2013. Contact: submissions@academinist.org

[The Death of the Perpetrator. Execution, suicide, identification, concealment, exhibition.](#) Deadline: 15th April 2013. Contact: coordinator@corpsofmassviolence.eu.

[Mothers and Mothering in a Global Context.](#) Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (JMI). Deadline: 1st May.

SCHOLARSHIPS

[Becas Fulbright 2014-2015.](#) Scholarships for postgraduate programmes in USA Universities. Deadline: 21st March.

[Becas de doctorado 'La Caixa'.](#) Scholarships for doctoral studies in Spain (deadline: 16th April), USA (deadline: 15th April) and Asia (deadline: 25th June).

[Comparative Education Beijing University. Deadline: 20th of March 2013.](#) Deadline: 20th of March.

[Premios Fundación BBVA Fronteras del Conocimiento y la Cultura 2013.](#) Deadline: 1st of July 2013.