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Leisure Activity, Ethnic Preservation, and Cultural Integration of Older Korean Americans

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SUMMARY. For immigrant groups, leisure activity has the potential both to increase familiarity with a new culture and to preserve cultural history and identity. Using a qualitative case study design, this research analyzed leisure activities of six older Korean Americans to determine both personal and cultural meanings of leisure. From a personal perspective, leisure was used to create two effects for the older adults: *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan*, which is the experience of a shift in emotional atmosphere as a result of engaging in activities; and self-development activities, which provide the older adults with opportunities for learning or growth. Cultural meanings of leisure activities included the re-creation of Koreanness and the reliance on familiar patterns to create a sense of security in a still-strange land. Thus, with the individuals studied in this investigation, leisure activities were used more often for continuity and ethnic preservation than for cultural integration. Social workers can use

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leisure activities as avenues to increase knowledge and social participation, but they should also take into account the need to preserve cultural and collective identity in older immigrants. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS. Leisure activity, older Korean Americans, immigrants, ethnic preservation, cultural integration

Being involved in leisure activities in social settings is particularly important for immigrants because it serves to connect them, in spite of the disruptive effects of their shift in life circumstances, to the "social worlds" of others (Kelly, 1996). In this way immigrants may gain familiarity with their new environment and/or rediscover and cultivate histories, cultures, and identities. People negotiate, define, and produce ethnic boundaries, identities, and cultures through social interaction inside and outside their ethnic communities (Nagel, 1994). The nature of leisure makes it an agreeable context for such processes (Stokowski, 1994) and provides an arena for intervention to help preserve and strengthen both social connectedness and self-identification.

Like other social behaviors, leisure activities need to be recognized as culturally specific. As Kelly (1996) acknowledged, leisure is distinguished not by time and activity, but by the particular use of time and the meaning of the activity. Because of cultural differences in meanings, activity forms, and values, different ethnic groups may practice and be shaped by different leisure experiences. Leisure provides a context in which individuals develop new identities and/or strengthen existing ones (Kelly, 1983; Kleiber, 1999); and these are tasks that are particularly important to immigrants. Although there is some understanding about how immigrants in general assimilate into the host society (e.g., Gordon, 1964; Hurh & Kim, 1984; Yinger, 1981), research has not been conducted to determine how expressing actions and social interactions of daily life influences cultural integration and ethnic preservation.

Examining how leisure pursuits relate to cultural integration and ethnic preservation of older Korean Americans has practical implications as well. As older Asian American populations continue to increase, social workers need to design and implement programs and interventions

that are based upon the experiences, strengths, and accomplishments of these older adults, their families and their communities (Browne & Broderick, 1994; Dhooper, 1991; Fong & Mokuau, 1994; Tsai & Lopez, 1997). Damron-Rodriguez (1998) refers to this as promoting an "appreciation of the elder's strengths won from a life lived" (p. 53). For social workers, an assessment of leisure activities and pursuits provides a method to understand the fit between an individual's personal and social worlds. The analysis of leisure activities of older Korean Americans that follows was conducted to determine both the personal and cultural significance of such activities. Before turning to the details of the current investigation, however, it is necessary to consider the immigration experience in a broader context.

IMMIGRATION: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

When people move from their homeland, the process and depth of acculturation into the new culture are based upon several factors. One is age, since the point at which immigration occurs is likely to influence the tendency to use activities to preserve ethnic identity or to facilitate acculturation to the host culture. Acculturation is likely to occur more easily in younger people, whose lives are yet to unfold in the new culture, than with older immigrants who have left more of their lives in their country of origin. For the latter, the past may be more significant than the future. Their daily patterns may change in accommodating to a different culture, language, and environment, but maintaining certain activities or interests in which they have engaged in the past may be especially important.

From a gerontological perspective, the aging process itself influences leisure choices and activities. Atchley (1989) asserted that people in later life attempt to preserve and maintain internal and external structures of their lives. This sense of *continuity* links an individual to the past through his or her personal history. According to Atchley, continuity can be either internal or external. Internal continuity is the integration of inner changes with one's past and a recognition of the relationship between old and the new selves (Lieberman & Tobin, 1983). External continuity is reflected in the structure of physical and social environments, role relationships, and activities that are maintained over time. Atchley (1999) highlighted long-term patterns of external continuity in terms of living arrangements, household composition, marital status, income adequacy, and primary modes of transportation. Atchley

(1987) found that relationships maintained with close friends, parents, and adult offspring were particularly important among older people. Thus, continuity of activities, relationships, and environments provides older people with the practical advantage of stability in spite of other changing and challenging circumstances. Maintaining an interest in preferred enjoyable activities contributes to both external and internal continuity.

Although there is clearly a preference for continuity in late life, discontinuity can be a source of growth and adaptation for people of all ages. Change is part of growing, learning, and adapting. This is particularly true in the case of adult immigrants. Change in social and physical environments caused by immigration may contribute to a disruption in both internal and external continuity, but discontinuity in roles, relationships, and social support may lead adult immigrants to adapt to changing circumstances in ways that are growth-producing. For instance, having breakfast at McDonald's with only Korean-speaking friends may nevertheless reflect a degree of acculturation, and slight variations in traditional Korean activities may also demonstrate accommodation to the new environment. Further investigation is thus needed to reveal how external and internal continuity are preserved in the context of immigration changes and if and how discontinuity in activity patterns contribute to adaptation and cultural integration.

For immigrants who are suddenly disconnected from familiar people and resources, family relations and living arrangements in a new culture are also very important in shaping the course of everyday life. For instance, older Korean Americans living with their adult children and grandchildren may develop a sense of belonging and recognition through family activities and interactions, though living in a residential area within American neighborhoods may isolate this population from other Koreans. In contrast, older Koreans living with other older Koreans in the same apartment complex may preserve their Koreanness more effectively than those who live in American neighborhoods, while the latter may be more acculturated to the host culture as a result of their living arrangements. Older Koreans living in the same apartment complex have more opportunities to interact with other Koreans, by speaking in Korean, watching Korean TV programs, singing Korean music, and sharing Korean food. All these cultural activities may remind them of who they are and to whom they belong in a foreign country. According to Kim (1981), this phenomenon is particularly common among first generation Korean immigrants with a strong desire to maintain part

of their own culture. Such activities may or may not replicate those in which they engaged prior to immigration.

We may ask then, how do immigrants choose leisure activities or adapt them once they come to the United States? What are the driving forces in their decision processes? And perhaps most important, what impacts do such choices have on maintaining a sense of self or creating a new sense of self and place? The purpose of this study was to explore daily activities and interactions of older Korean Americans and the relationship of these activities and interactions to ethnic identity preservation and/or cultural integration. This topic is important to social workers since they often strive to help immigrants become part of US culture without diminishing the ties to their traditional cultural norms and practices.

Within this research, first generation older Korean immigrants are of particular interest because they have lived in both Korea and the United States long enough to know both cultures. Using a qualitative analysis three main research questions were explored: (1) What are the meanings that older Korean Americans associate with leisure (*Yeo-Ga*) and other social activities?; (2) How are leisure activities (*Yeo-Ga Whahl-Dong*) and social interactions related to previous (pre-immigration) lifestyles and to ethnic preservation in older Korean Americans?; and (3) How do leisure activities and interactions contribute to the cultural integration of older Korean Americans in the United States?

METHOD

This study used the qualitative case study method to address the three research questions (Yin, 1994). Qualitative case studies are particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive (Merriam, 1988). A case study approach examines "a phenomenon in its natural setting, employing multiple methods of data collection to gather information from one or a few entities (people, groups, or organizations)" (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, 1987, p. 370). According to Yin (1994), case studies rely on systematic interviewing, direct observation, primary documents, secondary documents, and cultural and physical artifacts as the main sources of evidence. The sources of data used for this study were interviews, time diaries, and field notes.

Six Korean participants over the age of 65 were recruited from the metropolitan area of Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States. Although no official census records are available on the Korean American popula-

tion in Atlanta, the Korean American Association in Atlanta currently estimates about 50,000-60,000 Koreans residing in the area. The Korean American Welfare Center in Atlanta considered about 10% of the Korean population as older Koreans over 65 years old. The six participants recruited for this study had lived in the U.S. for at least 15 years at the time of data collection. The latter requirement was based on evidence that the longer people live in a strange culture, the more they acculturate (Hurh & Kim, 1984). This criterion thus selected for Korean Americans who have lived in the U.S. long enough to have adapted to the host culture to some extent. It also separated first-generation Korean American citizens and permanent residents from other types of residents such as short-term visitors.

First-generation immigrants with some level of English fluency were solicited for the research. The level of English fluency was measured by whether or not they could communicate minimally with Americans to ask directions, order food, greet American neighbors, etc. A diversity of living arrangements and gender were also considered in selecting the participants. Three males and three females were selected. Of these six, four were living in a residential area with American neighbors while two were living in a senior housing apartment complex with some Korean neighbors. Three participants (two males, one female) lived with a spouse, two (one male, one female) with children, and one (female) lived alone. The level of education the participants had acquired suggested their social status as middle to upper-middle class: Three males had higher than college degrees and three females had high school degrees.

The long interview method (McCracken, 1988) was used because it depends less on participant observation and extended contact. In-depth, semi-structured, open-ended conversational interviews (with voice recording), time diaries, and field notes were the primary sources for data collection. The long interview was arranged with the participants at their homes. In general, each interview took an intensive period of two to four hours, along with informal conversations when the first author stayed overnight at participants' home by their invitation. Several formal and informal follow-up interviews in person or by phone were conducted as needed. For instance, when formal interviews were interrupted because of personal circumstances of the participants, a makeup was arranged. The first author conducted all interviews over a period of four months, maintaining a journal to record her own reflections, as well as comments concerning non-taped verbal and nonverbal behaviors, and notations about the environment (cf. Patton, 1990).

Since data analysis in qualitative research is an ongoing process (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), initial data analysis started after the biographical information was collected from each participant. The participants were asked to complete a daily time diary for one week, which consisted of "when, where, with whom, and what" to plainly describe the leisure activities that occurred during that week. The time diary data were used to provide "talking points" for the interviews. Interviews were conducted in Korean and audio-taped. All audio-taped data were transcribed in the language (mostly Korean) spoken in the interviews. The best way to keep the meaning of what was said in the original data was to avoid translating and to use the original Korean transcripts for data analysis. However, specific sentences and paragraphs of Korean transcription were later translated to English to provide direct quotations that illustrate the research findings and interpretations. To increase trustworthiness of the data, interpretations of research findings were shared with co-authors and with participants as a form of member-checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The credibility and rigor of the research was further strengthened by an additional source. A Korean fellow researcher who has been educated in both Korea and the United States assisted in exploring cultural interpretations of the data.

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was applied for the data analysis. The basic strategy of the method was to constantly compare data from one time to the next and from one participant to another. For this study we first employed a "within case" analysis method, looking for consistency and differences in meanings portrayed by each participant, and then a "cross-case" analysis to identify shared categories and subcategories. Accordingly, the codes and categories generated for each case were developed as a result of considering each subsequent case.

FINDINGS

The analysis of leisure activity among older Korean Americans in this study revealed both personal and cultural leisure meanings though the personal also had cultural characteristics. The distinction was essentially that the personal served mainly individual psychological interests while the cultural meanings were thus associated with ethnic preservation and cultural integration. In the personal group, two general categories were distinguishable: *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* and self-development. *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* has particular Korean connotations associated

with escape and positive affect. We will examine these personal meanings first and then discuss the cultural meanings and significance of the activities in which the older Korean Americans engaged. The categories for cultural leisure meanings were (1) recreating Koreanness and (2) accommodation to the host culture: dancing between the old and the new. The report concludes with a discussion of the contributions of both personal and cultural meanings of ethnic preservation and cultural integration.

Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan

Although there is no research that has explored the relationship between *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* as a form of leisure in Korean society, this study suggests that for older Korean Americans *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* is a meaningful part of their daily leisure activities. This is an "emic" category (Geertz, 1983) in that it was offered by a participant and consistently recognized by other participants. Literally, "Ki-Bun" means "a state of mind, or atmosphere" and "Chun-Whan" means "change or shift." Therefore, *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* can be interpreted as a "shift in emotional atmosphere." A similar expression people often use is "*Ba-Ram-Ssoi-Da*," meaning "go out to get exposed to fresh air or atmosphere."

Activities people use for *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* range from spontaneous, unplanned, and solitary activities to planned, organized group activities. *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* enables one to escape from a routine life, reduce stress, and become refreshed and rejuvenated. People achieve Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan in active, social, and collective activities (i.e., drinking, singing, and dancing in a social gathering) but also in passive, personal, and solitary activities (i.e., reading and singing alone).

One participant (Olivia) stated that she sometimes enjoys singing alone for *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan*. Nevertheless, she admited that "it is better to have *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* with other people than by yourself" because "it is better to talk and laugh with others." This statement suggests that social interaction may contribute effectively to *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* even though it can occur alone as well. As one of the participants (Charles) put it, *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* in a social gathering is epitomized in "becoming elated and losing one's inhibition . . . dancing, playing around, having fun, making jokes, and then sharing funny stories." Common to such expressive patterns is the emotional uplift that they bring. *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* makes people feel better and causes them to forget

about other stressful aspects of life. But there are a wide variety of ways this is accomplished.

Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan can be differentiated in terms of both social interaction and motivation. As a casual form of leisure activities (low motivation), an individual can experience *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* with different degrees of social interaction. To take the example of window shopping, participants spoke of window shopping alone with no interest in socializing with other people in the activity, while in other cases they shopped with neighbors where there was a shared purpose. Regardless, window shopping in this study was a common source of *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan*, relieving boredom and creating some distance from the concerns of every day living. One participant identified window shopping and watching videotapes as activities she does alone when she gets bored with the day, while others pointed to shopping with others as a source of *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan.*

Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan is often found in more meaningful and expressive activities (high motivation) than shopping or watching television. Traveling seemed to create opportunities for more meaningful experience whether it was done alone or with others. *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* was also identified as the experience of becoming intensely involved in some activities such as game playing. One of the best sources of *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* was a social gathering in which people get together to eat and share stories with each other. One of the female participants remarked:

> Since we have been friends for a long time, we make all kinds of jokes with each other. By doing that, we reduce stress. Wives laugh at husbands' loud conversation. They just laugh and laugh. That's what we do in our gathering. I feel most comfortable when I meet my friends. We are like family. We discuss and share anything with each other without hesitation . . . (Sunny)

Singing was another regular source of *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* for several of the participants, but when it was done socially it also contributed to the experience of *Jeong* which is a sense of closeness with others. Emily described this feeling:

> . . . While singing you remember happenings from the past. It's good, you know . . . You feel good while singing. But, singing alone is a different story. You feel good when you socialize and have fun with friends . . . You feel close *Jeong* by doing it. You feel *Jeong* through close interactions and relationships with oth-

> ers. After social gatherings with neighbors, you find yourself feeling closer *Jeong* to them. (Emily)

When *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* was intense it resulted in a very absorbed state of consciousness akin to what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) called "flow" where everything else (e.g., time and oneself) is forgotten. Most often this occurred while involved in a similar kind of overt action such as playing *Mah-Jong*, but sometimes it occurred simply in watching others (e.g., Korean videotapes or one's grandchildren). Emily recalled her husband's comment in the past that he would forget everything from work as soon as he saw his grandchildren "and their playful tricks" when they had lived in an extended family setting several years ago:

> Our granddaughter has many talents. When she reached the age of four, after coming back from her school, she would have grandpa and grandma sit and pretend to be their teacher. We used to have fun in that way with our family members. Because of such fun with our grandchildren, we would easily get rid of our stress and fatigue from the hard work in the store . . .

Self Development

Unlike *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan*, the immediate experience of uplift, engagement, and escape is less important to some activities than the planned outcomes that are sought. They are chosen primarily for some advantage they provide for self-development. People choose certain activities because they provide an opportunity for intellectual, physical, psychological, or spiritual growth through the acquisition of knowledge, information, different perspectives, or spirituality rather than being simply a transcendence of every day life. In some cases, participants engaged intentionally in various activities for their educational value. The most common and frequent activities performed for self-development by participants were reading, watching TV, and traveling. While these are all done for *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* in some cases, they are also intentionally instrumental. For instance, traveling is an opportunity for changing oneself, as Olivia acknowledged:

> When you stay home all the time you envision only a small world, but you achieve wider perspectives when you go to foreign countries to observe how they live. You open your eyes and ways of thinking through traveling. You gain different perspectives from

> people who don't travel at all and always stay home . . . I find a lot of changes in my life after coming back from traveling. I live with a lot of stresses at home, but traveling around other countries among different people, I feel relaxed . . . and proud of myself and want to tell somebody about my trip and experiences (laugh).

Reading is done to collect information and knowledge to keep up with the changing society. For instance, Charles spoke about reading as his hobby through which he cultivates his life philosophy and feelings of happiness. He noted that it is a source of personal discipline rather than *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* for him: "I may have been a useless human being, but when I read, I feel that I am a very significant person. It stimulates my interests . . ." One of the women (Olivia) noted that she reads the Korean newspaper for information on health and listens to radio programs to learn English: "I usually get up at 7 am. The first thing I do in the morning is to turn on the radio. There is an English program called 'pop English' from which I learn a lot." One of the other women also indicated that by keeping up with Korean and American news through a Korean radio channel, she felt she kept in touch with both the old world and the new.

> . . . Yes, I turn on that [Korean Radio] channel for the whole day at home. I just listen to the news or other programs, but there is no special program that I favor . . . I listen to the Korean language. By listening to Korean news, I get Atlanta news or Korean news as if I am in Korea . . . I listen to the radio always. That helps me not to develop suffocating feelings that I don't need to feel like I am blind or confined . . . I know what is going on in Korea as well as in Atlanta. I like it . . . the news is in Korean, talking about both American news and Korean news. (Sunny)

Olivia further emphasized the significance of keeping up with information and knowledge in relation to acquiring self confidence. Olivia admited in the following statement that learning helped her become confident and independent.

> If you don't know what is going on in the world, it is depressing. You have to know so that you can communicate with others. If you don't know, you cannot participate in the conversation. Knowing is power. You accumulate confidence when you know more. It is better to spend your time for self-improvement. You should know

more to be confident of yourself, and others will acknowledge and respect you.

In sum, these older Korean Americans experienced *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* through various daily leisure activities and sought self-development through some of the same or other activities. In the next section the focus moves from the individual, social, and psychological meanings of activities to the cultural meanings that are derived in the context of *Yeo-Ga* (leisure). As will be seen, activities are often chosen because of their potential for creating *Jeong*, a feeling of closeness that makes individuals feel re-connected to their "Koreanness" and secure in a still-strange environment. At the same time, some of the self-development activities referred to above (e.g., listening to English language programs) contribute to cultural integration as well.

Re-Creating Koreanness

In this section, the cultural implications of daily leisure activities are examined by which older Korean Americans re-create their sense of "being Korean" or their "Koreanness." Three categories suggested by the data were re-building *Jeong* (attachment/care), re-enforcing collective identity, and seeking familiarity.

Rebuilding Jeong. This category encompasses attachment and closeness older Korean Americans feel, develop, and strengthen in interaction with other Koreans in various leisure activities. The Korean word *Jeong* has no English equivalent but contains a unique cultural meaning and refers to a special interpersonal bond of trust and closeness. *Jeong* is slowly developed through a period of interaction, adding other elements such as attachment, empathy, and care. According to Kim (2000), *Jeong* brings about special feelings in relationships including togetherness, sharing, and bonding. *Jeong* is what makes us say "we" rather than "I," "ours" rather than "mine." Koreans consider *Jeong* an essential element in their daily life. Involvement in leisure activities, particularly social, cultural, and collective gatherings promote these elements of *Jeong*. Several Korean terms and concepts that are closely related to the category of "rebuilding Jeong" will be introduced later in this section.

Jeong can be developed not only by family members and friends, but by any Koreans who share the idea of Koreanness. Sharing *Jeong* among Korean immigrants seems to be a significant source of unity and identification with each other while living in a foreign country. How-

ever, people share deeper *Jeong* with family members or close friends. Sunny described her social interaction with close Korean friends whom she met every month for over 10 years.

> . . . We meet once a month, just an informal social gathering with close friends. We call each other and one of our members will say, "I will invite our group for next month." No fixed date is set for every month. Someone else will take a turn for the next month. . . . We get together at a restaurant or the house of the invitor who will treat the group to a meal. . . . Sometimes, we go to Florida for a vacation . . . we have been meeting once a month for the last 10 years.

The primary purpose of the informal gathering is to socialize but the regularity of it suggests something more meaningful. Charles speaks to the value of socializing in more formal *Kye* meetings. *Kye* is a very common social gathering in Korea within which people satisfy their needs for financial support ("Money Kye") and social interaction ("Social *Kye*"). Exchanging information on any happenings in the community is another purpose of the social gathering. Charles acknowledged *Kye* as distinctively Korean:

> Like the Joy Luck Club, the *Kye* meeting is a cultural tradition for us to socialize. . . . It provides a motive to socialize. It's necessary in our society. It's part of our culture and lifestyle in our daily lives. That's the *Kye* meeting. . . . Without this gathering, we seldom have an opportunity to communicate with other Koreans . . .

In addition to reproducing *Jeong*, *Kye* and other social gatherings serve as a way to reconnect with the past and restore internal continuity, as Sunny noted:

> In Korea, we used to visit our neighbors all the time, this house or that house, but here in the States, we don't have that opportunity. So, when we get together, we like to talk about our lives in the past in Korea.

The informal gathering that took place in Korea that Sunny recalled is referred to as *Ma-Sil-Ka-Gi*. *Ma-Sil-Ka-Gi* is an activity that commonly takes place in agricultural societies where people settle down in the same place for generations. In the rural area of Korea, people would visit their neighbor's house after supper without any invitation or notice

in advance. They would spend most of the time talking, but dancing and drinking could follow. As Korean society became modernized, the pure form of *Ma-Sil-Ka-Gi* virtually disappeared in the urban area, but it is still reproduced in different forms of activities that demonstrate similar meanings.

Emily talked about a young man in her church who was a former (Korean) national diver and who volunteered to give swimming lessons to older Koreans in the church out of "*Hyo*" (filial piety) to his mother living far away. Because of the feeling of *Jeong*, he identified other Korean elderly with his own parents. Feelings of *Jeong* with the motherland are also expressed by Charles while listening to music from the past: "It takes me back to feelings and memories of my childhood that I had forgotten and now seldom think about . . . It's reminiscence."

In the case of John, a feeling of attachment toward his motherland is unconsciously expressed by his act of hanging a Korean national flag on the wall in the living room. Although John considers the national flag simply as a decoration, his bonding (*Jeong*) to the motherland is revealed in his behavior without his being aware of it. Involvement in religious practice on a regular basis is another influential factor in building *Jeong* with other Korean church members, as Emily noted:

> In our church we often met with church members to socialize and had fun without getting involved in social *Kye*. We did not get involved in any social *Kye* like other people who miss other Koreans, meet, and socialize. Other people might need it, but we did not have much to do with it. . . . We often had social gathering with our church members. We like it much more than social gatherings with other friends. . . . Maybe because we see each other every Sunday and keep in close touch . . .

Re-Enforcing Collective Identity. Older Korean Americans identify with other Koreans and create a sense of security by being members of a Korean community. They interact and socialize with each other by sharing the same culture, tradition, values, language, and physical appearance. Invigorating in ways referred to in the section *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan*, various leisure opportunities promote the sense of belonging and community for older Korean Americans. These include traveling, attending Korean senior school, or observing Korean traditional holidays. Traveling is an important activity through which older Koreans experience mixed and complicated feelings of who they are. By traveling together Koreans are reminded of the non-Korean world "out there" and

conversely of their own common culture through the reactions of others to them. Participants often possess two views of their own identity: legal and cultural. Older Korean Americans are well aware of their legal status as American citizens. However, they also know that they are Korean. In exposing themselves to others through travel Koreans acknowledge their own identity as Korean. Olivia offered a specific example:

> While traveling, people ask me 'What's your nationality?' I say, 'I am Korean.' . . . Although I acquired American citizenship, I am originally Korean. . . . Who would think me American? My skin color is different. Americans have white skin color and yellow hair, shouldn't I have it, too? . . . Even in my apartment, if somebody would ask my nationality, then I would say, 'I am Korean.' Who would believe me as American? Nobody. I've been recognized as Korean. Look, our skin color is different from Americans. . . . With lack of fluent English language ability, how could you say you are American?

This statement points out Olivia's awareness of her different physical appearance and lack of fluency in English. Differences in physical appearance may influence Korean immigrants to sustain their ethnic identity, not by choice but by psychosocial pressure. Language barriers also contribute to ethnic identification. As expressed in Olivia's statement, to be truly American, one should possess an American accent and fluency in English, in addition to an American appearance. One participant (Emily) emphasized that "Americans are different in physical appearance. They have a big nose, blonde hair, and different shapes of eyes, everything is different." Like others, Emily limits her definition of the term "American" to that segment of the American population which possesses these physical characteristics. The limiting itself is self-defining.

Observing Korean holidays also reminded Korean Americans of their original culture and traditions and provided an opportunity to get together with other Koreans who understand and share the meaning and significance of the holiday celebration.

> A couple on the 6th floor invited us for dinner to celebrate "January Full-moon day." They make '*O-Gok-Bab*' (rice with five different grains). . . . Everyone in the building will come. . . . After dinner, we might watch Korean videotapes. The husband of the dinner invitor always rents about ten videotapes with his own

> money for us. That's why we all can watch them all the time . . . (Olivia)

By watching Korean videotapes at the gathering, older Korean Americans experienced the same language, culture, and understanding of the stories. Emily explained that she watches Korean videotapes because she shares the same nation and race. In addition, attending Korean senior school reassured Olivia of some cultural stability in this foreign land. She recalled her feelings of the first day at the senior school:

> When I attended this senior school for the first time I was very moved by the fact that I can take a Korean music class here in another country. Staying at home everyday alone I had nobody to talk and laugh with, but now I am at the school, sitting in a music class, singing and thinking, 'This is great' . . .

Another source of collective identification was through organized sports clubs such as mountain climbing. John shared his experience of being a member of a mountain climbing club. The purpose of joining a sports club for John seems to be more for the activity itself, rather than for an opportunity for social interaction with other Koreans. He was very aware of being older than other club members, which prevented active interaction with them. Thus, *Jeong* was not particularly generated in this case, but a sense of collective identity was reinforced nonetheless:

> Here we (Korean Americans) have a mountain climbing club. With the club members on weekends, I go to mountains nearby. The one-day course starts in the early morning for 4-5 miles and then back home after lunch. I've done it for three years. . . . We have about 20-30 members as a group climbing once every month . . . . Everybody in the club is young . . . I don't hang out with other young members. I just go to the mountain with the group. After coming back from mountain climbing, I seldom get together with them to visit their houses.

Seeking Familiarity. Some of the interview responses suggested that some leisure activities had less to do with asserting Koreanness than with falling back on it for familiarity and continuity. Language familiarity reinforces older Korean Americans' tendency to continue listening to Korean radio channels and audio tapes, watching Korean videotapes,

and reading Korean newspapers and books, and interacting with other Koreans by speaking only in Korean. Various quotations illustrate these tendencies. Sunny admitted that "the first thing [I] do in the morning is to turn on the Korean radio channel . . . I like it very much. I can listen to the Korean news broadcast in Korean in my car. I love to listen to Korean news. In fact, we older people like to listen to all Korean radio programs." Some older Koreans, according to Sunny, would call a radio program in which callers are invited to sing on the phone.

Familiarity with language extended to watching Korean videotapes with other older Koreans. Watching Korean videotapes with Korean neighbors was a very common daily activity among those older Korean Americans living in the same senior housing apartment complex and became the focus of their congregating. Olivia said, "My Korean friend living across the hall always asks me to come to her apartment to watch [Korean] videos and laugh together . . . " Charles explains why watching Korean videotapes is a popular activity among older Korean Americans:

> The reason the elderly enjoy watching videotapes is that these programs show how they lived out their lives in the past. . . . The stories on tapes make them reflect on their life experiences . . . they re-visit their *Han-Kuk-Jeok-In-Geot* (Koreanness) in viewing the videotapes.

Preference for the familiar also influences the choice of restaurants for older Korean Americans. Sunny explained why she prefers Chinese restaurants over American restaurants in the following statement:

> First of all, I cannot go to an expensive and formal American restaurant because of language barriers. I cannot. We have many Korean restaurants as well as Chinese restaurants. When you go to a Chinese restaurant, you find people working in the restaurant speaking Korean very well. . . . I don't feel uncomfortable going to the Chinese restaurant because I used to eat Chinese food that I like in Korea.

Going to a Korean church is another way of maintaining the comfortable support of other Koreans. Emily gave her own reason for going to a Korean church: "I like Korean church . . . I like it because we can speak Korean, meet friends, and when we meet, we can hold each other's hands. That's what I like about going to Korean churches."

Another way to keep social interaction with Koreans is to attend formal or informal social gatherings. Tim explained the birth of *Kye* meetings after immigration: "In the beginning, we organized this *Kye* meeting for those who are very lonely, and who want to meet and enjoy themselves together once a month." Tim admitted that he was not interested in *Kye* meetings in the past in Korea, but in the U.S. "we seldom find a place for social gatherings, so we organized *Kye* for a meeting place to socialize with each other once a month."

Regardless of the efforts and determination of immigrants, particularly the first generation, to acculturate into the host society, the older Korean Americans in this study re-created their Koreanness by re-building *Jeong*, re-enforcing collective identity, and seeking familiar forms of the old culture. Nevertheless, it is also clear that they made accommodations to their host culture in the course of daily living, and leisure activities were a mechanism for this as well.

ACCOMMODATION TO THE HOST CULTURE: DANCING BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW

Although lifestyles and daily activities of older Korean Americans in this study are predominantly colored by the traditions, culture, language, and food of their motherland, there is no doubt that these people have struggled to fit between the two cultures. The tuning in to English language radio and the listening to Atlanta news on Korean stations are examples of accommodation, done as much out of personal interest as necessity. Sunny spoke of overcoming her homesickness during the early immigration period and learning to know and enjoy America after living here for 15 years, and John described a similar realization:

> Since I was not raised in the U.S. I couldn't say I know American culture, but after living here for over 30 years, I could not say that I *don't* know much about American culture. Either statement could be considered untruthful to someone else.

In beginning to live independently from her son, Olivia learned that "living alone means freedom. . . . Nobody bothers you if you jump around dancing or singing in your own space." This statement also demonstrates the experiences of independence brought about by living arrangements.

While we have established the place of watching TV and shopping in *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan*, watching American TV provides an exposure to the host culture as well.

> I don't watch American TV much, but sometimes I watch wrestling or skating. Wrestling looks very scary, beating each other with objects like iron chairs or lifting and throwing a woman . . . I just watch it because it draws my attention. . . . They look like beasts rather than human beings. I don't enjoy watching, but it is entertaining. The other evening, I happened to turn on the channel and watched for quite a long time . . . (Olivia)

Olivia distinguished entertainment from enjoyment in her statement by saying that she was entertained by the program, but she did not enjoy it. She seemed to take the role of spectator rather than participant in the activity. Nevertheless, watching American wrestling on TV was one way to get familiarized to the host culture. Going window shopping was another example that demonstrated the involvement in the activity as a spectator. Sunny shared her experience of going window shopping at a mall with her husband. They walked around with other Americans but were not fully engaged in the interactions: "We would sit there and watch Americans . . . watch them pass by because now we are not afraid of doing it."

Food is one of the most difficult habits to adjust to in another country, for adults in particular (Bourdieu, 1984). Nevertheless, several participants admitted that their meal habits, especially breakfast, have changed somewhat, after living in the States for a long time. One participant (Sunny) acknowledged her changes by saying that "Well, I like milk and cereal, so I feel I have changed." Another participant (John) prefered to go to McDonald's and to read American newspapers while having lunch there. Generally, though, the examples of using leisure for cultural accommodation and integration in the six individuals discussed in this investigation were far fewer than examples of ethnic preservation.

DISCUSSION

Obviously, leisure is not an isolated aspect of life or culture, but derives from complex social and interpersonal relationships and interactions. The nature of leisure is apparently connected to the meaning of community, social relationships and interactions, and the relationships between individuals and their environments (Stokowski, 1994). One

simple way to portray individuals' experiences in a new culture is to observe the dynamics of daily activities and interactions, which often occur in leisure contexts. This study examined the personal and cultural meanings of leisure experience of a group of older Korean immigrants. In this study, leisure (*Yeo-Ga*) was used personally to create two effects: *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* and self-development. *Ki-Bun-Chun-Whan* is a feeling of refreshment and transcendence that was found in a wide variety of activities. But some of the same activities, as well as others, were used for intellectual, physical, psychological, or spiritual growth and for familiarization with the host culture.

From a cultural perspective, leisure activities and social interactions were used more often for continuity and ethnic preservation than cultural integration. Older Korean Americans in the study maintained a high level of attachment to their ethnic identity. While physical and cultural differences perpetuated a feeling of strangeness, they used a wide variety of activities to reinforce their Koreanness and restore their sense of place. As Min (1991) stated, most Korean immigrants speak the Korean language, eat Korean food, and practice Korean customs most of the time. Many are affiliated with at least one Korean organization and are involved in active informal ethnic networks. Through networks such as churches, business organizations, alumni organizations, and senior schools, most Korean Americans maintain and strengthen social interaction with other Koreans.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

These findings suggest several implications for social work practice. Even though all of the participants in this study had lived in the U.S. for 15 years or more, a continued tension exists between being "Korean" and being "American." Part of this challenge is based on the differences between the more individually-oriented American culture and the traditional Asian value of collectivism (Balgopal, 1999). For these older adults, there is a strong desire to remain connected to that part of themselves and their history that is uniquely Korean. A wide variety of activities described in this research indicate a will to preserve their cultural identification. These included recreating traditional Korean activities in the U.S. (e.g., *Kye*), celebrating traditional holidays (e.g., January-Full-Moon Day), and establishing Korean social institutions (e.g., Korean American churches). Such activities should be viewed as a way to preserve cultural heritage and provide opportunities to retain

"Koreanness." In addition, these memberships and activities serve as points of contact between Korean community and the formal services that currently exist for older adults (Choi & Tirrito, 1999).

Although somewhat less commonly, older Koreans also used leisure activities as a way to learn more about and connect to the American culture. In certain cases, "Americanizing" their lives simplified their daily habits such as with the woman who discovered that she enjoyed cereal and milk for breakfast. In other cases, activities were intentionally instrumental, such as enhancing English language skills or learning about U.S. forms of recreation.

Several of the participants reported that participation in American culture continues to be difficult. Barriers to social participation and access to services must be addressed for Koreans and other ethnic/racial groups. Within this research participants reported alienation based upon their physical characteristics (skin and hair color) as well as language. However, the "double jeopardy" of being an older person of color was also evident. Being an older adult appeared to add another dimension since difference involves both cultural and age distinctions. This fact was reflected in comments from the older mountain climber who felt apart from the younger climbing group, even though they were Korean.

As the number of older adults continues to increase, social workers will be working with clients from a variety of cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. In this study, research on leisure activity of older Korean Americans provided significant information about how daily activities are used to strengthen cultural connectedness and preserve ethnic identity. By assessing and understanding how older adults choose to spend their time, practitioners can determine some of the challenges that older adults are facing as well as the strategies that are being used to manage these tensions. In addition, this type of analysis provides a rationale for creating social programs and interventions that have a special meaning in the lives of older adults, whatever their cultural and social backgrounds.

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