The Role of Recreational Sports in Understanding the life of Korean American Youth

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Drawing upon the two models of acculturation, this study attempted to explore the role of recreational sports in the life of Korean immigrant youth in the United States and to describe how Korean immigrant youth experience/participate in recreational sports in the U.S. From September 2010 to May 2011, we collected data from observations and semi-structured in-depth interviews with people of Korean descent attended in a sport class at the Korean language school. The findings of this study indicated that Korean immigrant youth used recreational sports as either the following three means: (a) preserving and maintaining Korean culture; (b) assimilation into the mainstream society (the U.S. in this study); and (c) rejecting the values and identity of both their original culture and the mainstream society. The study also found that some factors (e.g., social interaction with others, management of physical fitness, availability of sports in the U.S.) facilitated Korean youth to participate in recreational sports. In contrast, inhibitors (e.g., language barrier, the cost) of participating in the sports were also found. Theoretical implications and limitations of the study were also briefly discussed.

Key Words: recreational sports, acculturation, Korean youth, immigration
Introduction

For a number of reasons (e.g., studying, immigration, business), moving into a new society is a rapidly increasing phenomenon around the world, particularly in pluralistic societies such as the United States. According to the United States Census Bureau (2011), ethnic minority populations in the U.S. constitute over one-third (approximately 126 million) of the total U.S. population in 2010 (approximately 300.8 million). Such rapid growth of ethnic minority population is mainly due to significant increase of immigrants from diverse groups since the Immigration and Nationality Act has been passed in 1965 (Le, 2010). With such rapidly increasing diversity of the U.S. population, the relationship between recreational sport participation and the life of individuals who have migration background (e.g., international students, immigrants, second-generation of immigrants) is a critical social topic. As a result, numerous studies have attempted to explore how recreational sports influence the life of various minority groups in settlement of a host society (Allen, Drane, Byon, & Mohn, 2010; Lee, 2005; Lee & Funk, 2011; Olliff, 2008; Stodolska & Yi, 2003; Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004; Taylor & Doherty, 2005; Yu & Berryman, 1996). For example, Stodolska and Alexandris (2004) found that recreational sport participation facilitated inter-group contacts and broke barriers among immigrants, other ethnic group members, and mainstream Americans. Moreover, some immigrants utilized sport participation as a vehicle to solidify ties with their ethnic community and to preserve their ethnic values.

One of the important psychological constructs to an understanding the life of immigrants was acculturation. Acculturation is defined as a phenomenon that takes place when people having a different cultural background come into continuous, direct contact with a host culture (Berry, 1990, 1997). According to the literature, there are two perspectives of acculturation. The first perspective is known as unidimensional model of acculturation. This model is based on the assumption that adaptation to the host culture is seen as necessarily accompanied by a weakening of ties to one’s culture of origin over time so that an acculturated individual almost gives up his/her culture of origin (Nguyen, Messe, & Stollak, 1999). In other words, it can be described that an individual’s level of acculturation moves from un-acculturated to completely acculturated to the host culture on a single