

Korean American Males' Serious Leisure Experiences and Their Perceptions of Different Play Styles

KANGJAE JERRY LEE

RUDY DUNLAP

DAVID SCOTT

Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX, USA

This study examined Koreans Americans' serious leisure experience with different racial groups. Interviews were conducted with 15 Korean male basketball and soccer players. A key finding was that participants recognized different styles of play between Korean Americans and other racial groups. While some participants cared little about other players' race/ethnicity, other participants played exclusively with Korean Americans and preserved or promoted their ethnic identity. While Stebbins (1982) argues that serious leisure provides eight durable benefits, our findings suggest self-identification may be another durable benefit, at least among ethnic and/or racial minorities.

Keywords ethnic identity, Korean Americans, play styles, serious leisure

Over the past several decades, the United States has experienced a rapid increase in numbers of ethnic and racial minorities. Minorities are expected to become the majority in 2042 and will constitute 54% of the U.S. population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2008). In anticipation of this social change, the number of studies focusing on minority groups' leisure has increased steadily over the past 20 years, and research about the leisure behavior of racial and ethnic minorities has become an important subfield within leisure studies (Floyd, 2007). To date, researchers have identified the existence of clearly differing leisure constraints (Scott et al., 2006; Shinew, Floyd, & Parry, 2004; Stodolska, 1998), preferences for leisure activities (Ho et al., 2005), park usage (Floyd, Gramann, & Saenz, 1993), and leisure participation patterns (Gobster, 2002; Tinsley, Tinsley, & Croskeys, 2002) between White Americans and people of color. These studies have illustrated the unique characteristics of leisure behavior of marginalized populations, and deepened our understanding of leisure among people of color.

While there are an increasing number of studies on race and ethnic issues in leisure research, race and ethnicity have received surprisingly little attention in studies on serious leisure. Serious leisure describes the systematic pursuit of leisure activity with unusual intensity and earnestness (Stebbins, 1982, 2007). Researchers have examined this concept through diverse leisure activities, including basketball (Heo & Lee, 2007), cultural tourism

Received 29 April 2010; accepted 23 February 2011.

Address correspondence to KangJae Jerry Lee, Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences, Texas A&M University, 2261 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-2261. E-mail: kangjae@tamu.edu

(Stebbins, 1996), Civil War reenacting (Hunt, 2004), tournament bass fishing (Yoder, 1997), package adventure tours (Kane & Zink, 2004), shag dancing (Brown, 2007), stamp collecting (Gelber, 1992), and contract bridge (Scott & Godbey, 1992). Studies have also explored serious leisure of specialized groups, such as American Kennel Club members (Baldwin & Norris, 1999), people with disabilities (Patterson & Pegg, 2009), football fans (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002), female Sea Cadet Corps (Raisborough, 1999), and female windsurfers (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). Despite this abundance of research, little is known about serious leisure among people of color.

The study of minorities' serious leisure participation is imperative for expanding our understanding of the phenomena. Given the differences in the leisure experiences of White Americans and people of color that have been identified in previous studies, it is reasonable to expect that serious leisure experiences of minorities may also differ from those of mainstream White Americans. Thus, investigation about the serious leisure of people of color is expected to reveal unique characteristics of their experiences that have been historically glossed over, and shed fresh light on serious leisure behavior. Moreover, given the rapid growth of the Asian population in the United States, the study of minorities' serious leisure might have broad implications for policy decisions that help improving the delivery of leisure services to people of color.

As a response to these expectations, this study examines the experience of serious leisure among Korean Americans.¹ Since a paucity of research investigating Korean Americans' serious leisure is available, this study aims to gain richer insights into Korean Americans' serious leisure by exploring how Korean Americans' ethnic background shapes their pursuit of serious leisure with other racial and ethnic groups. Thus, this study was guided by two questions: (1) How do Korean Americans experience serious leisure? (2) How do Korean Americans think about their serious leisure with different race/ethnic groups?

Literature Review

Korean Americans

Since the arrival of 102 Korean farm laborers in Honolulu, Hawaii, on January 13, 1903, the number of Korean Americans has increased dramatically (Kim, 2004). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, approximately 1.2 million Korean Americans live in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). The Korean American population increased 34.3% from 1990–2000, more than double the growth rate of the entire U.S. population (Le, 2010). Moreover, the number of Korean immigrants in the United States grew approximately 250% between 1970 and 2007, making them the seventh largest immigrant group in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2009).

Despite this remarkable growth of the Korean population in the United States, only a few studies have investigated their leisure behavior. Stodolska and Alexandris (2004) examined the role of recreational sports in Korean and Polish immigrants' adaptation to the U.S. society. They found the majority of their informants experienced low levels of recreational sport participation upon immigration. They further identified that while recreational sports provided a mechanism for some middle-class Korean Americans to interact and

¹Korean Americans are defined as Koreans immigrants who came from Korea to live permanently in the United States, including second generation Koreans who were born in the United States. It also includes Korean international students who want to live in the United States upon completion of their academic program.

develop relationships with middle-class White Americans, others used recreational sports to maintain their ethnic identity by playing exclusively with other Korean Americans. Scott et al.'s (2006) study of the relationship between Korean immigrants' acculturation and leisure constraints found that Korean immigrants perceived leisure constraints differently based on their level of acculturation. Acculturated Korean immigrants were more likely than less acculturated Korean immigrants to report fear of making a mistake and fear of discrimination as leisure constraints. Regardless of their level of acculturation, however, Korean immigrants were not significantly constrained by lack of English proficiency and fear of discrimination, considered to be two unique constraints among immigrants. Moreover, all Korean immigrants experienced leisure constraints that are similar to the general population, such as lack of time, information, and money. Kim, Scott, and Oh (2005) analyzed the effects of acculturation, leisure benefits, and leisure constraints on acculturative stress and self-esteem of Korean immigrants. They found Korean immigrants' level of acculturation and leisure benefits were positively related to self-esteem. They suggested acculturation and leisure benefits play a critical role in enhancing self-esteem among Korean immigrants. In general, previous studies tended to explain Korean immigrants' leisure in terms of leisure constraints and acculturation. Less is known about Korean Americans' serious leisure experiences.

Serious Leisure

The term serious leisure was originally coined by Stebbins (1982) who defined it as:

[T]he systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience. (p. 5)

Stebbins (1982) distinguished three types of serious leisure participants, amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers, and insisted that serious leisure can be understood by its six distinct qualities. They are (1) the occasional need to persevere, (2) tendency to establish careers, (3) significant personal effort to develop skills and knowledge, (4) obtaining eight durable benefits as a consequence of activity, (5) sharing and immersing in unique ethos, and (6) identifying strongly with the chosen activity. Stebbins (1997) argued serious leisure differs from its conceptual counterpart, casual leisure, which he defined as "immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity, requiring little or no special training to enjoy" (p. 18). Although serious and casual leisure were initially proposed as two contrasting concepts, Shen and Yarnal (2010) argued the traditional dichotomy of serious-casual leisure is problematic. They found that members of the Red Hat Society simultaneously experienced the qualities of serious and casual leisure, indicating serious and casual leisure are not mutually exclusive but constitute a continuum of involvement.

Researchers have explored the concept of serious leisure via diverse activities. One unique finding from a handful of studies is serious leisure allows participants to distance themselves from outsiders. For example, in a study of members of American Civil War Society (ACWS), Hunt (2004) reported many of the White males he interviewed felt the involvement of females and African Americans in the "living history" activity undermined the authenticity and realism of historical reproductions. ACWS members seemed to enhance and revalorize their male identity through "escape into a macho culture of militarism and camaraderie" (p. 402). Similarly, Gibson, Willming, and Holdnak's (2002) research on University of Florida football fans showed some fans identified themselves as highly

committed supporters and labeled themselves “Gators” rather than simply “Gator fans” (p. 417). Likewise, Heo and Lee’s (2007) study of seven Korean college students’ serious basketball experiences demonstrated that participants strengthened their in-group solidarity and ethnic identity by playing basketball with other Korean students. For these Korean students, serious leisure functioned as a coping strategy to deal with the hardships of living in the United States by distancing themselves from mainstream American culture and engaging in ethnic boundary maintenance.

Almost all studies of serious leisure to date have focused on the experiences of White Americans. To the best of our knowledge, Heo and Lee’s (2007) study appears to be the only study that has focused on serious leisure of racial/ethnic minorities. Many aspects of minority participants’ serious leisure experiences remain unexplored. For example, Heo and Lee focused on Korean students’ serious leisure experience with other Koreans and did not examine their interaction with other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, all seven Korean students were born in Korea and had lived in the United States no more than five years. Thus, an investigation of serious leisure among a more diverse group of Koreans is expected to broaden our knowledge of serious leisure of people of color.

Methods

Given the need to describe and analyze the nuances of Korean Americans’ serious leisure experiences, this study utilized a qualitative approach to inquiry. As is true of many activities undertaken in leisure, the experiences of participants were highly contextualized and therefore demanding of a set of research methods capable of capturing their lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Parry & Johnson, 2007). Broadly speaking, our approach to inquiry is informed by Blumer’s (1969/1986) symbolic interactionism and its current incarnation as interpretivism (Denzin, 2007; Patton, 2002). This inquiry tradition espouses the experiences of daily life are laden with complex meanings that are the product of both an immediate interaction among participants as well as the larger socio-cultural field in which they find themselves. As Patton (2002) described, the purpose of interpretive inquiry is to seek answers to questions such as “how [participants] perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (p. 104). It follows then that our sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures attempted to capture the complex meanings of participants’ experiences on the basketball court and the soccer field.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) was employed to recruit Korean Americans who participated or have been participating in recreational sports with unusual passion and commitment. Participants were identified through two key informants who were members of Korean basketball and soccer clubs at large universities in the southern United States. The key informants facilitated a process of snowball sampling that identified members of the informants’ social network who were likely to have had relevant leisure experiences. With the assistance of key informants, we deliberately recruited Korean Americans who participated or have been participating in sports activity with different racial and ethnic groups. Despite our intention to interview both female and male participants, our sampling strategy failed to recruit female Korean Americans. We first contacted potential participants via telephone call and e-mails, explained the nature of research, and then requested their participation.

Participants

A total of 15 Korean American males agreed to participate in the study. Ten participants were born in Korea, and the others were born in the United States. Eleven of the participants played basketball as their primary recreation activity, while the other four played soccer. Participants' ages ranged from 19–36, and their length of residency in the United States ranged from 3–32 years, the mean being approximately 11 years. All participants were either currently enrolled in a college or had obtained at least a bachelor's degree.

Participants varied regarding their degree of commitment, frequency of involvement, and subjective sense of passion toward their activity. Most (12) participants displayed a level of commitment that was unequivocally serious, while three participants displayed a more moderate commitment to their leisure pursuits. Taking into account Shen and Yarnal's (2010) research that documented leisure pursuits as occurring on a continuum ranging from serious to casual, and given the paucity of research related to ethnicity and serious leisure experiences, we decided to include the data from these three moderately serious participants in our study. Table 1 provides information about the 15 study participants.

Data Generation

Data were generated from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with research participants that occurred in August and September 2008. Such interviews attempt to strike a balance between providing an overall structure and trajectory to the conversation, while being sufficiently flexible to explore topics of unexpected interest to the interviewer (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Spradley, 1979). As such, our interview protocol explored a list of topics related to dimensions of serious leisure and participants' leisure participation patterns. Some examples of interview questions are: (1) How much time and effort do you put in playing (basketball or soccer)? (2) What kind of outcomes or benefits do you get from playing (basketball or soccer)? (3) Can you describe your experience of playing (basketball or soccer) with different racial groups? We also sought other information from interviewees, including their birth place and the extent to which they feel comfortable communicating in English. Since the first author is fluent in Korean and English, the interviews were conducted in English, Korean, and/or a mix of both languages according to each participant's preference. All interviews were audio recorded to facilitate subsequent transcription and analysis. Our interviews averaged an hour in length and were conducted at the first author's house and office as well as at local coffee shops near two universities. Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed into English. While transcribing the interview transcripts, we recognized a need for additional interviews to clarify certain themes and obtain more details regarding participants' serious leisure experiences. We conducted follow-up interviews with four participants and asked them to elaborate on the topics they mentioned during the initial interview. The follow-up interviews were conducted over the telephone and lasted approximately 40 minutes each.

Data Analysis

Based on Colaizzi's (1978) analysis method, we completed a five-step data analysis process. First, we read through all interview transcripts several times to become familiar with the contents of data. Second, significant statements, meaning "the phrases or sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomenon," were extracted from the transcripts (p. 59). Third, we spelled out the meanings embedded in the significant statements and coded each meaning with the designation of interview location, characteristic of interviewee, and

TABLE 1 Characteristics of Participants

-
- I-1. Peter; 22 years old; college student; born and lives in the United States his whole life; played football in junior high school; enjoys both basketball and soccer but mainly soccer; involved in Korean soccer club.
 - I-2. David; 20 years old; college student; born in the United States; lived in Korea for seven years; plays soccer approximately twice a week with a racially diverse group of people; involved in a city league soccer team; started playing soccer in the fifth grade.
 - I-3. Jake; 21 years old; college student; born in the United States; lived in Korea for seven years; enjoyed playing track, tennis, basketball, soccer, and tennis in high school; favorite sport is soccer and started playing seriously three years ago; involved in a Korean soccer club; participates in intramural soccer league with his high school friends who are racially diverse.
 - I-4. John; 29 years old; college student; married; born in Korea and came to the United States when he was seven years old; has lived in many different states; used to be on a track team when he attended middle school in Korea; a former state champion wrestler; used to play both soccer and basketball for his high school; involved in a Korean soccer club.
 - I-5. Woosung; 19 years old; college student; born in Korea; came to the United States when he was 12 years old; started playing basketball after he arrived in the United States; lived in racially diverse neighborhood where few Asians lived; majority of his friends are not Asians; involved in a Korean basketball club.
 - I-6. Jeehun; 30 years old; business owner; married; born in Korea; came to the United States when he was four years old; possesses a strong passion for basketball and golf; grew up in African American neighborhood and used to play basketball only with African Americans; used to play and practice basketball almost everyday when he was a college student; involved in a Korean basketball club.
 - I-7. Minsoo; 24 years old; college student; born in Korea; lived in Argentina and Mexico before he came to the United States; lived in the United States for four years; involved in a Korean basketball club.
 - I-8. Edward; 20 years old; college student; born in Korea; lived in the United States for four years; enjoys both soccer and basketball; plays soccer with racially diverse group of people; involved in a Korean basketball club.
 - I-9. Taehyon; 33 years old; graduate student; single; born in Korea; came to the United States four years ago; started to play basketball when he was a high school student; possesses strong passion for basketball; the leader of a Korean basketball club.
 - I-10. Bob; 20 years old; college student; born in Korea; came to the United States when he was 13 years old; used to play basketball almost every night before he got a back injury; involved in a Korean basketball club.
 - I-11. Chulsoo; 31 years old; graduate student; born in Korea; came to the United States when he was 24 years old; enjoys basketball; a founding member of a Korean basketball club.
 - I-12. Taewon; 33 years old; graduate student; married; born in Korea; came to the United States when he was 28 years old; enjoys basketball; involved in Korean basketball club; prefers to playing basketball with his Korean friends.

(Continued on next page)

TABLE 1 Characteristics of Participants (*Continued.*)

-
- I-13. Harrison; 36 years old; professional; single; born in Korea; moved to the United States when he was four years old; used to play basketball but stopped playing due to busy schedule at his job.
- I-14. Daniel; 20 years old; college student; born in the United States and has stayed in the United States for 5 years; plays basketball.
- I-15. Josh; 20 years old; college student; born and has lived in the United States his whole life; plays tennis and basketball.
-

Note. The interviewees' names used in this study are pseudonyms.

particular events during interview. Fourth, we formulated meanings into clusters of themes, and the clusters of themes were compared to original transcripts in order to validate them. Finally, the themes were integrated into an exhaustive description of the investigated topics.

Trustworthiness

We employed several methods to bolster the rigor of our data generation and the verisimilitude of our findings. First, we conducted member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) upon completion of the data analysis. We were able to validate the data and outcomes from data analysis via member checking. Second, the primary author employed a number of tactics that ensure honesty among participants (Shenton, 2004). From the outset of each interview, he emphasized there were no right or wrong answers to interview questions and encouraged participants to be frank. In addition, he answered honestly the participants' questions about his background and recreational sport experiences with mixed racial groups. By informing participants the primary author was also a Korean immigrant sport player, he was able to quickly establish rapport with the participants and ensure accuracy of data. Finally, the primary author analyzed his own biases about serious leisure and recreational sports with other racial groups prior to the data collection. Since the data collection and analysis were conducted by the first author, it was important for him to be fully aware of his predisposition about the phenomenon under investigation because the researcher is the primary instrument for qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). His analysis compelled him to examine his longstanding interest in recreational sports, particularly his 14-year basketball career. Although he played basketball at various locations with diverse group of people, he saw only few Asians from the basketball courts where he played in the United States because Whites or African Americans usually occupied the courts. He sensed that Whites or African American players often stared at him with perplexed or even suspicious looks when he played pickup basketball with them. He sometimes felt his White and African American teammates were reluctant to pass the ball to him during the games. He believed his skin color affected the way in which other players evaluated his basketball skills. Through this self-examination, the primary author was able to maintain insight toward the phenomenon during this research and strengthen trustworthiness of the study (McCracken, 1988).

Findings

Four central themes emerged from the data analysis. First, participants described their quality of serious leisure, particularly perseverance and effort they put forth when participating in recreational sports. Second, participants identified different styles of playing

recreational sports based on players' race and ethnicity. Third, participants were divided into three groups according to their preferred play styles and teammate. Finally, participants reported they deliberately socialized with other Koreans via serious leisure activity which reinforced their ethnic identity.

Serious Leisure Experiences

Participants described their serious leisure experience of playing basketball and soccer. Among the six qualities of serious leisure, participants explicitly expressed their perseverance and effort in sport activities. Taewon articulated he always wanted to play basketball and continued playing basketball even though he had had knee surgery and had not completely recovered from it. His perseverance in basketball is reflected as follows:

I felt a sharp pain at my left knee after playing basketball . . . Then I took MRI and we found that a cartilage at my knee was torn. I received surgery. I started to play basketball again last month even though I feel minor pain after games because I like it so much.

Taewon resumed playing basketball even though he put himself at risk of experiencing another injury and significant financial loss. He admitted people might think him "reckless" or even "idiotic," yet he stated he would not stop playing basketball. He was strongly attached to basketball and eager to resume play.

Chulsoo is another participant who described his commitment to basketball. Upon his arrival in the United States as a graduate student, Chulsoo first purchased a recreation center membership in order to play basketball. Although Chulsoo was not confident in his English skills and did not have any friends or acquaintances at that time, he went to the recreation center by himself and played basketball with strangers:

Before I contacted my academic advisor, the first thing I did [after I came to the United States] was purchasing a gym membership and played basketball . . . You can usually find a group of people at a basketball court. So at the beginning, I only played with Americans. I couldn't speak English and didn't know anything about rules in here but I wanted to play.

Chulsoo's commitment to basketball was reflected in his efforts to find places to play basketball when arriving in the United States. While some studies indicate immigrants stop participating in leisure activity upon immigration (Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004) and poor English skills constrain leisure participation (e.g., Juniu, 2000; Rublee & Shaw, 1991), Chulsoo was undeterred in his desire to play basketball. Similar to Taewon, he regarded basketball as very important and he was resourceful in accessing an environment in which to play. Jeehun stressed he put forth much effort to improve his basketball skills. Jeehun stated:

I really got into basketball my freshman year in college. I was 19 years old . . . and then I realized that I was adopting and learning [basketball] pretty quickly. I played literally almost every day for several years since then. Not only just playing but I go out and practice and work on certain skill sets. Just to improve certain abilities and things like that. I wanted to become a better player.

Jeehun emphasized he played basketball “almost every day for several years.” He further stressed his strong orientation to skill development and differentiated himself with occasional players who played basketball just for fun. Through his comments, Jeehun implied he adhered to professional standards in basketball.

Similar to Jeehun’s long-term commitment to basketball, participants articulated their prolonged career in basketball or soccer. They portrayed their lengthy engagement as follows:

John: I wanted to be a professional soccer player when I was a kid . . . I’ve been playing soccer more than 10 years.

Bob: Basketball is like the sport that I play a lot. I’ve been playing more than eight years. I played pretty much every night before I got hurt.

Woosung: I love basketball. I’ve been playing basketball almost 10 years.

Taehyon: Three most important things in my life. My job, my family, and basketball It’s been almost 20 years since I initially started basketball.

These participants proudly conveyed they had careers in the activity, and some were eager to explain they were frequent participants. They depicted their passion and earnestness and described themselves as committed players rather than simply dabblers or occasional players.

Some durable benefits from serious leisure were also identified from participants. Self-gratification or pure fun (Stebbins, 1982, 2007) was one of the most prevalent benefits participants obtained from their activity. For example, David commented on how much he enjoys soccer:

Playing soccer on a beautiful sunny day at nicely trimmed soccer field is like the best thing for me. The best! Well, actually, playing soccer on a rainy day can be quite enjoyable, too (laugh). My point is, it’s just so fun. I enjoy soccer more than anything else. I don’t know what else can give me more pleasure than playing soccer.

David experienced extreme enjoyment by playing soccer. He emphasized this point by using an example of playing soccer on a rainy day. Similarly, other participants described their attachment to basketball or soccer as their “favorite activity” (Harrison) and some said they thought about the activity “before fall asleep on the bed” (Jake).

Other durable benefits were also identified by participants. Peter recalled his experience of playing soccer with his classmates when he was a high school student:

I started to get more respect from my classmates after a couple of (soccer) games. I guess they didn’t know I was that good (at soccer), because I’m kind of shy person . . . so I saw that they treated me differently. They called me more frequently and asked me to go out and that kind of stuffs. It was great. I was, I was more confident about myself and made more friends. I don’t think we could be friends if I didn’t do well (at the soccer games).

In this statement, Peter mentioned enhancement of self-image and social interaction (see Stebbins, 2007). Peter gained self-confidence and made more friends through soccer.

Different Play Styles

Participants recognized that different racial and ethnic groups have unique style of playing sports. They noted different styles of playing sports were manifested in individualistic play, aggressiveness, straightforward verbal expression, and different rules. Taehyon, the leader of a Korean basketball club and an enthusiastic basketball player in his early 30s, described the individualistic play style of American basketball:

If I play with Americans (Whites or African Americans) in the same team, it's not fun . . . it is about style. Individual play style is so prevalent among [White and African Americans] compared to Koreans. We can communicate and ask them to do team play and pass the ball more frequently but it is inappropriate to telling what to do to people that I first meet.

Participants also perceived White or African Americans focused more on one-on-one matchups, whereas Korean Americans cared more about the overall performance of the team. Minsoo made the following point:

American players' individualistic play style is one of negative things that you have to take into account when you play with them. Americans only care about their match-ups. As long as you can defend your match-up player well, you are okay and they don't care what you do. However, one-on-one match-up is not everything about basketball. You must do some team play.

Josh made a similar point:

I think they (Whites or African Americans) care more about their match-up than playing as a team. I feel that they take one-on-one play very seriously If you pass the ball to other teammates and don't try to shoot or dribble in front of your match-up, they seem to believe that you are scared to your opponent or not confident to playing better than your opponent. It's very different dynamic and sometimes I'm frustrated because, I mean, there are the moments that passing is more effective for scoring instead of shoot or dribble, right? But they don't pass the ball even though I'm completely open or other players are open. So I don't expect to receive many passes when I play with Whites and African Americans.

Thus, some participants perceived Whites or African Americans play basketball more individualistically compared to Koreans. Participants felt an individualistic play style is neither enjoyable nor an ideal way of playing basketball.

Moreover, some participants stated White or African American players were openly verbal and aggressive in their exhortations toward other players. Korean participants considered this behavior rude and inappropriate. Edward noted:

I think Americans tend to express their opinion and feeling without any hesitation. They tell other players what to do and stuff like that. That sometimes offends me. I guess it's because of different culture, and Americans are straightforward,

and, you know, don't care about age gap that much. But, in Korean culture, it's very unusual that people directly tell what to do to total strangers. Especially, it's unimaginable that younger people say such things to older people. But, Americans do.

Some participants pointed out different degrees of intensity that Americans engaged in while playing sports. Taewon noted:

What I realized when I played with Americans is . . . Americans are physically very strong regardless of their basketball skills. They do a lot of hustle plays . . . I think Americans are better than Koreans, in average. Usually they are physically stronger than us . . . I don't know about offense but their defense is much intense and tougher than us.

Similar to these basketball players, Korean soccer players also perceived different degrees of intensity when they played with others, particularly Hispanics. David felt Hispanics soccer players displayed harsh manners and he regarded their play as "rough and dirty." The interview excerpts below provide a glimpse of his experience:

David: Recently, last Sunday, when we played our last [intramural] game, the majority of teams were Hispanics. Right before the game, our coach which was my friend, she was like "There is a bunch of Hispanic people. It would be a tough game." It's like an immediate response that just comes to people. But if you actually watch Mexican soccer, like Mexican soccer club league, that's generally how they play.

Researcher: Really?

David: Yeah, they play really rough, they tend to nothing really happen but they fall, they said they hurt.

Researcher: Interesting. So I guess there is some kind of difference?

David: Yeah, different culture. You can say it's a stereotype but you see it quite often enough to where you can just pick it up immediately.

David's experience of playing soccer with Hispanics shaped his perceptions about Hispanic soccer players.

Some participants described the existence of different rules among different ethnic groups. When Minsoo first started playing basketball with Americans, he noticed different rules pertaining to foul calls and the manner in which a game was resumed. In pickup basketball in the United States, fouls are typically called by the player who receives the foul. However, in Korea, the foul call is usually made by the player who commits the foul. Similarly, in the United States, the offensive team has to pass the ball to the defensive team and conducts a "check" when the game is temporarily stopped due to a foul or out-of-bound play. It is conducted to confirm that defensive players are ready to resume play. However, in Korea, checks do not exist and players resume a game without such confirmation. Overall, participants pointed out individualistic play, aggressiveness, straightforward verbal expression, and different rules to illustrate different play styles between Koreans and other

racial groups. They perceived these differing play styles were based on players' race and ethnicity.

Different Preferences for Other Players

Recognition of different styles of play across different racial and ethnic groups impacted some informants' participation patterns and preferences for other players. We found participants could be grouped into three groups based on their preferences for other players.

The first group consisted of participants who lacked ethnic and/or racial group preferences with regard to teammates and opponents. These participants said they did not consider race or ethnicity of other players as important when they participated in recreational sports. Rather, they insisted participants' *skill level* was the most critical criterion when selecting partners and games in which to play. Chulsoo's comments neatly captured these participants' mentality:

It's just about one's ability. Although we might evaluate others through their appearance at the first time, after we play one or two games together, I think one's skill level tells you everything. I like to play basketball with people who have similar level of skills with me. Color is not an issue [when I choose my teammates].

Chulsoo stressed teammates' skill level over their racial background. Similarly, Jeehun believed opponent players' skill level was more important than their race and ethnicity as a basis for enjoying basketball:

[Who I play basketball with] has nothing to do with racial side of it. That has to do with skill sets. I remember the last time that I went out there [for playing basketball]. There was just one team primary Chinese. There are many Asian teams but [that Chinese team] played really well and they were winning a lot of games. I really wanted play with them not because they were Chinese and not because they were Asians. I wanted to challenge them because they seemed like, they were good enough. So it has more to do with truly their competition level than racial diversity.

Thus, the primary concern of this group of participants was playing with people who have similar or even better skill levels. They felt the ethnic or racial background of other players was unimportant in what contributed to quality recreational sports.

The second group consisted of participants who prefer Korean teammates when they participate in recreational sports. Participants in this group felt White and African Americans' play styles are neither enjoyable nor legitimate ways of playing team sports. Taehyon described his experience of having American teammates when playing basketball:

I mean, there are pros and cons when I play with Americans in the same team. But, I do not enjoy playing with Americans. People usually say Americans are better players but, I think, it's not the matter of skill levels. It's about difference in styles. American players tend to do a lot more individualistic plays. You know? They don't do team play and pass as much as us . . . it's not fun. It's not fun at all.

Participants such as Taehyon believed having Korean teammates makes their participation in recreational sports more enjoyable than when they play alongside Whites or African

Americans. Edward also articulated that he prefers not playing basketball with Whites or African Americans because of their play styles:

I go to play basketball to refresh myself and enjoy basketball. But then, why do I play basketball with people don't pass to me and don't give me many opportunities to play? So I tend to avoid playing basketball with Whites or African Americans because they don't pass as often as other Asians or Korean Americans. I wanna touch the ball and play basketball. I rather go jogging if I don't receive pass and just run a basketball court back and forth.

As Taehyon and Edward articulated, they did not consider Whites and African Americans' styles of play as enjoyable and an ideal way of pursuing team sports. Thus, this group of participants deliberately avoided playing with Whites and African Americans on the same team.

A third group of participants were those who favored Koreans not only as teammates but also as opponents. These participants stated playing exclusively with Koreans as more comfortable than playing with other races because Koreans share a common language and cultural practices. Moreover, these participants believed there was a great possibility of injury when playing with Americans due to their aggressive and intense style of play. Taewon stated this sentiment as follows:

The main reason why I only play basketball with Koreans is that it's more comfortable. We speak same language and share same culture so it's much easier for me to communicate and interact with other players. And, the game with Americans is too intense and dangerous. I don't wanna get hurt.

This group of participants also disliked mixed racial games because of the amount of verbal abuse they had witnessed and/or experienced. Josh noted:

One day I played with this tall White player. We were losing at that game and he started to yell at us and even try to instruct us during in the game. I was like, who the hell are you? Are you my coach or something? . . . But he was totally crossing a line and telling what to do to people that he didn't know. In fact, he was not a good player at all. We all wanted to enjoy our game but he was ruining enjoyable atmosphere. I'm not trying to make a generalization and saying that all White folks are rude or anything like that . . . It was probably a personality issue and he was just a bossy player. But I feel that Whites or Blacks are very straightforward in expressing what they want compared to Asians in general. So I prefer just playing with other Koreans.

In sum, these participants felt playing exclusively with Koreans was safe and more conducive to fully enjoying their participation in recreational sports.

Maintaining and Learning Korean Culture

Some participants suggested serious leisure activity was a means for maintaining their ethnic identity. This characteristic was particularly evident among participants who were associated with Korean basketball or soccer clubs. Taehyon noted:

I believe that my club has unique characteristics simply because of the fact that we are all Koreans. It would be a challenging task to embrace Americans to our team while we maintain our unique characteristics . . . I think going to a travel with club members or going out and having a drink with club members are very Korean-like socialization. I like this Korean color in my team and wish that this club maintains such Korean characteristics.

Taehyon's comments suggested that he did not have a strong intention to adopt American members and culture into his club and wanted to preserve Korean culture in his club. In this case, the club functioned as a social outlet for its members. The club members were able to socialize with other Koreans and maintain their social network with Korean friends through the club activities. In other words, being involved in Korean sports club was one way members could preserve their cultural and ethnic identity after they came to the United States. Bob also confirmed this point in his comments about joining the Korean basketball club:

Imagine that you go to play basketball with your friends. You don't just play basketball and go home when you are done. You interact with other teammates and ask them how they have been and so on. Sometimes you go out with your teammates and have some drinks after basketball. You are not only playing basketball but also establishing friendship with other Koreans. I joined this Korean basketball club not simply because I wanted to play basketball but because I wanted to make more Korean friends and keep my Korean identity. On top of that, I feel more comfortable to be with my Korean teammates than being with other racial groups. I don't know why. If I do the same things with Americans, go out and hang out, I personally don't get the same level of comfort. I don't know. Maybe it's in my blood.

Bob specifically chose a Korean sport club because he wanted to keep alive his "Korean heritage." Participants like Bob maintained their Korean heritage by deliberately interacting and communicating in Korean with other Korean members. Significantly, these interactions occur within serious leisure contexts.

Being involved in a Korean sport club also helped Korean Americans who had been in the United States for several years reclaim their Korean identity. Jeehun came to the United States when he was four-years-old and was in his early 30s at the time of the interview. He said he had had limited contacts with other Koreans and his friends were all Whites and African Americans. He had been Americanized and felt more comfortable communicating in English. He stressed his knowledge of Korean culture and the language had been greatly improved as a result of his involvement in a Korean basketball club:

I mean [playing basketball with Koreans] helps me to better understanding my culture and the country where I came from. Getting associated with Korean culture and Koreans in general, that happened to me later in my life. It's very recent thing. So before I play basketball with this Korean team, all my friends were Americans (White and African Americans).

Similar to Jeehun, Peter recalled his initial stage of involving in a Korean soccer club and described how he regained his ethnic identity:

I joined this club a couple of years ago . . . I was probably the most Americanized member in the club, well, I was simply an American . . . I heard and experienced a little bit of Korean culture through my parents when I was a kid. But, that's about it. So I guess it (joining Korean basketball club) was, sort of a wake-up call for me . . . I started to find out more about myself.

Although Peter was born in the United States and had never been to Korea, he was able to learn Korean culture and trace back his Korean identity through interacting with his friends in the Korean soccer club. He articulated this experience as "a wake-up call" in his life. Hence, some participants' serious leisure context was imbued with Korean culture. This context allowed the participants to meet with people who shared the same culture and language and distance themselves from mainstream American culture. Moreover, in the case of Jeehun and Peter, who had been Americanized and had lost Korean identity, participating in serious leisure activity with other Korean Americans was a way to reclaim his Korean ancestry and identity.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain richer insights into the serious leisure of Korean Americans and examine how Korean Americans perceive their participation vis-à-vis other ethnic and racial groups. On the one hand, our findings are consistent with those of other studies in the sense that participants manifested many of the qualities of serious leisure as put forward by Stebbins (1982, 2007). For example, participants overcame injuries, pain, and difficult situations to maintain sustained involvement in recreational sports. They also devoted significant time and energy to improve and hone their skills. Moreover, participants greatly enjoyed their activity and established meaningful friendships with other Korean Americans. In sum, results confirmed participants persevered, displayed effort, had careers, and experienced many durable benefits and social rewards that characterize serious leisure.

On the other hand, findings from this study extend our understanding of serious leisure by bringing to light new insights about the nature of serious leisure among ethnic minorities. Korean Americans saw their style of play in recreational sports as quite different compared to their American counterparts. Korean basketball players, for example, claimed they emphasized team play while Americans usually focused on one-on-one match-ups and individual play. Korean Americans also frowned upon what they perceived as the rough-and-tumble style of American sports. Although leisure researchers have documented participants within any given activity tend to differ in their orientations and preferences (e.g., Brown, 2007; Scott & Godbey, 1992), little has been done to describe how different styles of serious play vary by race and/or ethnicity.

What factors explain interethnic variation in playing styles? Although multiple explanations may be offered, the most simple and convincing explanation is Korean and American players embrace different cultural values. Irwin, Gartner, and Phelps (1990) reported differences between Hispanic Americans and Anglo Americans in terms of preferred camping facilities and camping styles and argued these differences were linked to their respective cultural identities. In our study, differences in play styles reflect core differences in cultural values related to individualism and collectivism. The former is considered to be a representative American value, while the latter is common cultural value of Southeast Asian countries (Ferraro, 1998; Triandis, 1995). A collectivistic outlook underscores why Korean basketball players valued team play and perceived that American players were heavily inclined to individual play. Fundamental differences in cultural values probably shape the very fabric of their involvement in serious leisure. These differences resulted

in many Korean basketball players deliberately avoiding playing recreational sports with non-Koreans. These differences also helped us understand why participants felt many of the non-Koreans with whom they had played basketball or soccer were ill-mannered and overly competitive, qualities that also were antithetical to Korean culture (Hofstede, 2001).

These results suggest serious leisure can be used for ethnic boundary maintenance (Barth, 1969) or ethnic enclosure (Stodolska, Marcinkowski, & Yi-kook, 2007). Some Korean Americans may use serious leisure to highlight how they are culturally different from nonimmigrant groups. Thus, serious leisure served as a context through which Korean Americans can maintain and nurture community ties among themselves by communicating in their native language and playing recreational sports according to cultural norms and customs. Serious leisure, at least for some Korean Americans, provides a mechanism for promoting ethnic heritage and distancing participants from American culture.

Related to the notion of ethnic boundary maintenance, our findings suggest serious leisure activities may also function to establish boundaries where none had previously existed. In addition to the eight durable benefits and several personal/social rewards derived from serious leisure (Stebbins, 2007), findings from this study suggest that one other durable benefit *some* people experience is ethnic self-identification. Many members of Korean basketball clubs immersed themselves in Korean culture and the Korean language by participating in serious leisure with other Koreans. This serious leisure context was an occasion for second-generation Korean Americans to rediscover their Korean roots and ancestry and allowed participants to celebrate their Korean identity and insulate themselves from the dominant culture. Thus, for some participants, serious leisure participation might serve as a venue for exploring an ethnic identity and establishing ethnic boundaries that are blunted in other settings.

It is important to note some participants enjoyed competing against White, Black, and Hispanic participants. These individuals emphasized the importance of playing against quality competition and were relatively unconcerned about others' styles of play. For these participants, serious leisure was not a mechanism for boundary maintenance. What accounts for different preferences with regard to co-participants? Had we focused explicitly on acculturation, we might conclude differences stem from language skills and the number of years informants had lived in the United States. Acculturation, however, was not a major objective of the study, and in retrospect we did not identify any particular relationship between participants' preferences and language skills or other indicators of acculturation. We also did not observe any difference among participants with regard to level of skill. Coming to terms with an underlying explanation for differences in co-participant preferences is beyond the scope of the study. Suffice to say, there appears to be diversity among Korean Americans involved in serious leisure activities. Findings of both interethnic and intra-ethnic dynamics within the same leisure activity provide an important implication for leisure service organizations and recreation program planners and managers. Practitioners should understand that various ethnic and racial groups whom they serve are not only likely to differ from another in their leisure preferences and behavior, but ethnic/racial groups themselves are likely to be heterogeneous in their styles of participation. Without taking into account these variations, leisure service organizations and practitioners are likely to ignore the specific needs of their clientele as they seek to create effective recreation programs or marketing strategies that entice diverse populations to their program and resources.

This study contains several limitations, all of which are linked to suggestions for future research. First, this study only captured serious leisure experiences of first- and second-generation Korean Americans. Future research should seek to incorporate the experiences of third- and fourth-generation Korean Americans to better facilitate an exploration of the extent to which acculturation shapes inter-ethnic play. Second, our findings represent males'

perspectives only. Future studies may investigate the extent to which minority women's experience of serious leisure are also affected by cultural difference and ethnic boundary maintenance. Third, this study investigated the case of recreational team sports that are intrinsically competitive in nature. Researchers can investigate minority's serious leisure activity through recreational sports which do not require competition such as recreational running and weight lifting. Finally, this study was conducted in two southern cities. Acquiring study samples from more diverse locations will help determine whether or not findings can be generalized more broadly. By filling these gaps, researchers might be able to unearth further details of serious leisure of minorities.

The varied experiences of Korean American in this study exemplify the complex interplay of ethnic identity and participation in serious leisure more generally. As suggested by our findings, inter-ethnic differences in styles of play may be understood by players as competing claims of activity legitimacy. For example, whereas Korean participants' preferences for team-oriented play may be understood as a reflection of collectivist cultural values, they portrayed these differences as reflecting their commitment to playing the game *as it was meant to be played*. In other words, there very well may be a taken-for-granted attitude that team-oriented play is a more legitimate style of play than the individualized, American-style of play. As a result, players may not understand that competing styles of play reflect a plurality of equally legitimate forms, but rather view these styles as superior and inferior. These claims of competing legitimacy are notable to the extent they correspond and reflect underlying ethnic identities, which may contribute to feelings of ethnocentrism and inter-ethnic conflict. Future research on serious leisure should focus on how race and ethnicity informs participants' ideas about activity legitimacy to better understand the meaning of serious participation among diverse populations.

References

- Baldwin, C., & Norris, P. (1999). Exploring the dimensions of serious leisure: Love me-love my dog! *Journal of Leisure Research*, 31, 1–2.
- Barth, F. (1969). *Ethnic groups and boundaries*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Blumer, H. (1969/1986). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Brown, C. (2007). The Carolina shaggers: Dance as serious leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 39, 623–647.
- Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. Vaile & M. King (Eds.), *Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (pp. 48–71). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (2007). *Symbolic interactionism and cultural studies: The politics of interpretation*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2005). *SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ferraro, G. P. (1998). *The cultural dimension of international business* (pp. 88–114). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Floyd, M. (2007). Research on race and ethnicity in leisure: Anticipating the fourth wave. *Leisure/Loisir*, 31, 245–254.
- Floyd, M., Gramann, J., & Saenz, R. (1993). Ethnic factors and the use of public outdoor recreation areas: The case of Mexican Americans. *Leisure Sciences*, 15, 83–98.
- Gelber, S. (1992). Free market metaphor: The historical dynamics of stamp collecting. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34, 742–769.
- Gibson, H., Willming, C., & Holdnak, A. (2002). “We’re Gators, not just gator fans”: Serious leisure and University of Florida football. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 34, 397–426.

- Gobster, P. (2002). Managing urban parks for a racially and ethnically diverse clientele. *Leisure Sciences*, 24, 143–159.
- Heo, J., & Lee, Y. (2007). “I don’t want to feel like a stranger”: Korean students who play basketball seriously. *Leisure/Loisir*, 31, 133–154.
- Ho, C., Sasidharan, V., Elmendorf, W., Willits, F., Graefe, A., & Godbey, G. (2005). Gender and ethnic variations in urban park preferences, visitation, and perceived benefits. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 37, 281–307.
- Hofstede, G. H. (2001). *Culture’s consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hunt, S. J. (2004). Acting the part: “Living history” as a serious leisure pursuit. *Leisure Studies*, 23, 387–403.
- Irwin, P., Gartner, W., & Phelps, C. (1990). Mexican-American/Anglo cultural differences as recreation style determinants. *Leisure Sciences*, 12, 335–348.
- Juniu, S. (2000). The impact of immigration: Leisure experience in the lives of South American immigrants. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 32, 358–381.
- Kane, M., & Zink, R. (2004). Package adventure tours: Markers in serious leisure careers. *Leisure Studies*, 23, 329–345.
- Kim, I. J. (2004). *Korean-Americans: Past, present, and future*. Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym International Corporation.
- Kim, C., Scott, D., & Oh, C. (2005). Effects of acculturation, leisure benefits, and leisure constraints on acculturative stress and self-esteem among Korean immigrants. *Society and Leisure*, 28, 265–296.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Le, C. N. (2010, September 27). *Population statistics & demographics. Asian-Nation: The landscape of Asian America*. [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.asian-nation.org/population.shtml>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Migration Policy Institute. (2009). *Korean immigrants in the United States*. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=716>
- Parry, D. C., & Johnson, C. W. (2007). Contextualizing leisure research to encompass the complexity of lived leisure experience: The need for creative analytic practice. *Leisure Sciences*, 29, 119–130.
- Patterson, I., & Pegg, S. (2009). Serious leisure and people with intellectual disabilities: Benefits and opportunities. *Leisure Studies*, 28, 387–402.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Raisborough, J. (1999). Research note: The concept of serious leisure and women’s experiences of the Sea Cadet Corps. *Leisure Studies*, 18, 67–71.
- Rublee, C., & Shaw, S. (1991). Constraints on the leisure and community participation of immigrant women: Implications for social integration. *Society and Leisure*, 14, 133–150.
- Scott, D., & Godbey, G. (1992). An analysis of adult play groups: Social versus serious participation in contract bridge. *Leisure Sciences*, 14, 47–67.
- Scott, D., Lee, S., Lee, J., & Kim, C. (2006). Leisure constraints and acculturation among Korean immigrants. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 24, 63–86.
- Shen, X. S., & Yarnal, C. (2010). Blowing open the serious leisure-casual leisure dichotomy: What’s in there? *Leisure Sciences*, 32, 162–179.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22, 63–75.
- Shinew, K., Floyd, M., & Parry, D. (2004). Understanding the relationship between race and leisure activities and constraints: Exploring an alternative framework. *Leisure Sciences*, 26, 181–199.
- Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Stebbins, R. (1982). Serious leisure: A conceptual statement. *Pacific Sociological Review*, 25, 251–272.
- Stebbins, R. (1996). Cultural tourism as serious leisure. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 23, 948–950.

- Stebbins, R. (1997). Casual leisure: A conceptual statement. *Leisure Studies*, 16, 17–25.
- Stebbins, R. (2007). *Serious leisure*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Stodolska, M. (1998). Assimilation and leisure constraints: Dynamics of constraints on leisure in immigrant populations. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 30, 521–524.
- Stodolska, M., & Alexandris, K. (2004). The role of recreational sport in the adaptation of first generation immigrants in the United States. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 36, 379–413.
- Stodolska, M., Marcinkowski, M., & Yi-Kook, J. (2007). The role of ethnic enclosure in leisure in the economic achievement of Korean immigrants. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 39, 1–27.
- Tinsley, H., Tinsley, D., & Croskeys, C. (2002). Park usage, social milieu, and psychosocial benefits of park use reported by older urban park users from four ethnic groups. *Leisure Sciences*, 24, 199–218.
- Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2002). *The Asian population: 2000*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf>
- U.S. Census Bureau News. (2008). *An older and more diverse nation by midcentury*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/012496.html>
- Wheaton, B., & Tomlinson, A. (1998). The changing gender order in sport? The case of windsurfing subcultures. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 22, 252–274.
- Yoder, D. (1997). A model for commodity intensive serious leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 29, 407–429.