



Causal and Intervening Conditions of Korean Immigrants' Sport Participation in the United States

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Abstract

Purpose: This study attempts to investigate causal and intervening conditions for sport participation of Korean immigrants in the United States. **Research design, data, and methodology:** Grounded theory approach was used to develop a conceptual framework that presents the psychosocial processes that occur in immigrants' experience of sport participation. Participants were selected purposefully for information-rich cases. Korean immigrants with current experience of having periodically participated in sports were the criterion for sample selection. Based on selection criteria, 9 Korean immigrants took part in interview. The interview discussions were taped and transcribed verbatim into a Word file. The process for data analysis included four grounded theory approaches of purposive and theoretical sampling, an open and axial coding, memo writing, and finally the development of the conceptual framework. **Results:** Six concepts were revealed in the causal conditions that facilitate the process of immigrants' sport participation in the states: Personal experience, significant others, personality, physical environment, psychological well-being, and social connection. Three concepts were revealed as the intervening conditions that block the process of immigrants' sport participation in the states: Conflict with cultural change of organization, Pressure at workplace, and Economic constraints. **Conclusions:** Conceptual model presents causal and intervening factors. Further implications were discussed.

Keywords: Korean Immigrant, Culture, Sport Participation, Causal Condition, Intervening Condition

JEL Classification Code: I10, I12, I18, I19

1. Introduction

Over the last forty years, immigration and higher fertility rate among some, mostly visible, minorities have changed the composition of the American society (Lichter, 2012). The increase in the ethnic diversity of North America has been one of the most powerful demographic forces shaping U.S. and Canadian society (Wickes, Zahnaw, White, & Mazerolle, 2013).

With increase and diversity of minority populations and concern of their leisure and sport behavior, during the last twenty years, a significant number of studies of minority groups were conducted to investigate a variety of issues related to sport, leisure and recreation (Henderson & Ainsworth, 2001). Some studies have founded that free time activities may help immigrants to uncover their place within the new society, redefine their inter-personal relationships, find new goals in life and reevaluate their identify within the new social environment (Kim, Chun, Heo, Lee, & Han, 2016; Kim, Heo, & Lee, 2016; Stodolska & Yi, 2003). On the other hand, the other research observed that there are significant differences in terms of recreational sport participation patterns and preferences among ethnic minority groups (Gobster, 1998; Grey, 1992). Moreover, it has been suggested that members of ethnic minorities are among the most disadvantaged in terms of recreational sport participation.

However, although interest and participation in leisure and sport of immigrants has been increasing, there is still lack of research on issues related to their sport behavior and influent conditions. Most work on the topic has focused on ethnic minority groups in the context of school, college, and professional sports (Kim et al., 2016; Okamoto,

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Herda, & Hartzog, 2013). The other studies have often focused on the role of sport in the cultural issues that include cultural adaptation, assimilation, and ethnic identity (Huang, Calzada, Cheng, Barajas-Gonzalez, & Brotman, 2017; Ngo & Li, 2016).

Even though there are significant numbers of studies of minority groups and sport, there is still lack of studies related to social conditions and factors that affect the decisions immigrants make regarding their participation in sporting activities. It is important to identify the role of sport for minority groups in the cultural context of the states, however, in order to better understand this complex phenomenon and sport behavior of immigrants, further research is required to identify socio-psychological predictors that affect immigrants' sport participation. Hence, this study focuses on the social conditions that affect immigrants' sport participation in the states and their network.

The objectives of the study were twofold. First, it is to identify social conditions that facilitate or block the process of Korean immigrants' sport participation. Second, it is to explore the relationship between social conditions and sport participation.

2. Methodology

Grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to develop a conceptual framework to help explain the psychosocial processes that occur in immigrants' experience of sport participation. Based on symbolic interactionism, grounded theory focuses on people in a continuous process of giving shape to their world worlds (Blumer, 1969). Research questions in grounded theory reflect the interest of symbolic interactionism in process over time, and the methods of making and analyzing data reflect a commitment to understanding the ways in which reality is socially constructed. Hence, this approach is particularly suitable to theories about psychosocial processes, was developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), and is called the paradigm model. As the purpose of the study, Grounded theory method were adopted in this study.

2.1. Participants

Sample was selected purposefully for information-rich cases (Patton, 1990). Korean immigrants with experience of having periodically participated in sport clubs for last three years was the criterion for sample selection. Based on selection criteria, 9 Korean immigrants were recruited for the interview. Initial verbal consent was obtained and the interview date and time was arranged through phone call. The interview took a convenient place for participants. Interview took 30minutes to 1 hour to complete and it was tape-recorded with little notes being taken. During the interview, researcher used open-ended questions to ensure that the data would develop as freely as possible.

2.2. Data Analysis

The interview discussions were taped and transcribed verbatim into a Word file. Interview transcript was reviewed multiple times after transcription not only to determine if there was any further information that may be misunderstand during the initial transcription process, but also to extract phrases, words, concepts and meaning that is pertinent to the lived experience of participating in sport in U.S.

The process for data analysis included four grounded theory approaches of purposive and theoretical sampling, an open and axial coding, memo writing, and finally the development of the conceptual framework. Axial coding is the systematic questioning of the data to explore tentative hypotheses and linkages among the substantive codes (Horner, 1997). This analysis was used to clarify the basic phenomenon experienced by immigrants and to discover the process whereby they dealt with their experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical memos (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were used to record ideas about the emerging theory. The researcher noted ideas about theoretical properties, causal and intervening conditions and consequences of emerging concepts during open and axial coding.

3. Results

3.1. Causal Conditions

Six concepts were revealed in the causal conditions that facilitate the process of immigrants' sport participation in the state: Personal experience, significant others, personality, physical environment, psychological well-being and social connection.

3.1.1. Personal experience

Immigrant was affected profoundly by his experience in Korea. Personal experience of playing sport in Korea made a respondent keep participating in sports, particularly, basketball and tennis. He described his experience in Korea as follow:

“I played the basketball sports night and day. When I was in high school, my friends and I created the first Basketball Club in the school.”

In Korea, he had strongly involved in sport club and activities. His experience in Korea has influenced in keeps playing sports in the state.

3.1.2. Significant others

Immigrant was affected by significant others such as Korean and American who were met by chance, and friend in the same dormitory. He met several people who affected his attitude and interest toward sports activities. He had a lot of chances to keep playing sports through social support from significant others who were met by chance. He stated,

“When I first came to the states, while I was in the Language Development Program, there was a guy who played the basketball game with me. His name is Ku Geon Jeong was Korea University Basketball Team player...and he lived in the same dormitory as I. That is how we got to go the REC center together and play the basketball game.”

Moreover, when he begun working in the company, he did not play sports much because of lack of time and opportunity. But he met member who participate in tennis in Korean sport club by chance and again he started participating in sports. He described how to meet him as follow:

“When I started working in the company, I did not play sports much. One day I met this guy who was involved in OOO Tennis Player...I went to play tennis with my wife, but I was not able to play much because I had to teach her. While we were at the court, there were four other Korean people playing tennis. I was bored just teaching my wife, so I asked the other Koreans to play a rally with me. And they were okay with it. The person who played with me had very bad body ache the next day.”

Respondent also met American by chance. This meeting made him more involve in sports.

“Playing tennis only once a week on Friday was not enough. So I started looking for people to play tennis more. While I was looking, I found some people playing tennis close to my workplace. After that, I went by every Wednesday to play the game with them. While I was practicing with them, I found out that they were in Austin Tennis League (ATL). When the fall came, three months later, they invited me to play in their team. I was really happy so I started to go and join the ATL team.”

3.1.3. Personality

Personality of respondent significantly contributes to his sport activities. His out-going personality provided him with a lot of chances to play sports with other people. As he stated about his personality, ‘I am a out-going person. I am very open minded and love meeting different and new people, so had no difficulties’. He described how his personality affected to reach new people as follow:

“While I was looking I found some people playing tennis close to my work...There were Americans who were practicing tennis. So I went there and asked if they have a room for an extra player. When they said, “Sure, you can play,” I played with them. After that, I went by every Wednesday to play the game with them.”

Moreover, he liked to compete with others. A competitive spirit motivated him more and more. He enjoyed competition and strongly wants to win. A competitive spirit seems to drive him to involve in sports games. He stated,

“Instead of enjoying the activities, I enjoy the competitive side. “I want to be better.” That is why I play the sports, not to have a healthy body, but to feel good about winning. That is what my personality is like. So, I play sports not only for having good health, but for the thrill of winning others.”

3.1.4. Physical environment

Physical environment helped respondent to participate in sports. In the early stage when he was college student, he could easily access to facilities and used them whenever he wants. He stated,

“I occasionally played basketball because I can just go by myself and join others who are playing the game. I can go to the REC center and go and play with African American students. When I

wanted to play sports, I would go to the REC center and play the game or work out for 2-3 hours and would come back home.”

Moreover, well-organized league system affected him to keep playing sport.

“I feel that the league system in the states is well put together. Very organized. I was really happy, so I started to go and join the ATL team. In Austin, ATL was a big league with 1 to 12 divisions. The ATL was that well put together. Anyway, the sports for all was well developed in the states.”

3.1.5. Psychological well being

Respondent wanted to get psychological benefits through sport participation. Participants liked competition and winning very much, but eventually, they wanted to get enjoyment, and sense of achievement through thrill of winning. Hence, sports, competition and winning are significant energy in his life and they offer something special that they cannot feel at workplace. Korean immigrants described how much they want to see the advance and progress through sports.

“That is why I exercise is not because I love exercising, but to feel the thrill of winning in being proud my advancement. In the workplace, I cannot feel the advancement. Only thing I see from work is that I get a yearly increase in salary, but I cannot see any growth in my career in workplace. I enjoy my work. The time passes well at work, there is no special feeling. In sport, when I concentrate one thing, I can see my progress. And that is what I enjoy it.”

The respondents felt thrill of winning, sense of achievement and enjoyment through competitive sports. As a result, they were obtaining intangible psychological benefits through sport participation.

3.1.6. Social connection

The respondents took part in sports clubs such as ATP and ATL not only because they could meet people outside of workplace, but also because they could obtain new information from new network around them. Immigrants wanted to enlarge their social boundary through sport participation. A respondent states,

“If I meet my colleagues at work and off work...My network would be just that, my work. This would decrease the networking boundary and no new information can be collected. My life would be very boring by meeting same people again and again.

3.2. Intervening Conditions

Three concepts were revealed as the intervening conditions that block the process of immigrants' sport participation in the state: Conflict with cultural change of organization, Pressure at workplace, and Economic constraints.

3.2.1. Conflict with cultural change of organization

The change of sports club's culture and member affected sport participation. Even though Korean immigrants liked sports and competition, which was not all. The respondents was struggling against cultural change of sport clubs they have attended. They described their feeling of young members' attitude as follow:

“People do not gather together as much in the younger peers and their individuality is too strong. So I have lost my interest. I used to help people out and try to make an event for everybody to participate, but nowadays I feel like I am overruling and bulling everybody to do things. People don't want to do minor things to keep the organization flowing. Like getting the water for the players, paper work and so on. The younger members in ATP would do everything they need to do and would try to get out of their responsibility for ATP. When I see this I feel bad. That is why I do not attend the ATP meetings much.”

Korean immigrants also have happy memories with its old members and they missed them. Member change in sport clubs made them to lose interest in sports. A participant recalled,

“Yes and since my friend went back to Korea, it is no longer enjoyable and I do not attend the meeting frequently as before.”

As a result, conflict with cultural change of organization made him to lose interest in sports.

3.2.2. Pressure at workplace

Immigrant's sport participation was negatively affected by pressure that immigrants feel at workplace. The respondents liked sports and would like to talk about sport at workplace, but they did not do that because they think that colleagues would feel uncomfortable. A respondent described colleagues' response as follow:

“It is hard to get really close with the people who I work with. If I ask my colleague to play sports after work, they would feel uncomfortable and I feel that way too. That is why we do not do any sports activities after work.”

Ironically, Korean immigrants would like to show their seriousness, not sportsman because of their image at workplace. A participant stated,

“Anyway, I would want to play tennis with my colleagues, but did not want to be seen as a sportsman. Because I only want to show my seriousness about my work to my colleagues. I want to enjoy my life away from work. I do not want to show my colleagues my playing around.”

3.2.3. Economic constraints

In the early year in the state, time and cost negatively influenced Korean immigrants’ participation in sports activities. Even though they liked basketball and any other exercise in Korea, they did not enough time and money to spare with sport activities because they were an international student and had to study and work. A respondent recalled,

“When I was in high school, I was crazy about basketball, but when I came over to the states and was studying and working, I was not able to play.”

4. Discussion

The conceptual framework explains the experiences and understandings of sports participation of Korean immigrants with respect to social conditions and their relationships. Respondents revealed that Korean immigrants were positively affected by six causal variables; personal experience in Korea, significant others, personality, physical environment, psychological well-being and social connection, on the other hand, they were negatively influenced by three intervening conditions that include conflict with cultural change of organization, pressure at workplace, and economic constraints.

Personal experience of immigrant affected sport participation in the states. When he was high school student, basketball was the only major activity for his life. The study indicated that this pattern keeps influence him in playing sports in the states. Previous studies supported this idea. Physical exercise’s most important function is to prepare youth for a lifetime of physical activity (Sallis & McKenzie, 1991). Youth is more likely to continue participation when their experiences related to physical activity are positive (Haywood, 1991).

Personal experience of participation in sport is also positively related to the amount of social support coming from significant others. The study indicated that significant others affected Korean immigrant’s experience of sport. Respondent stated that his friends in the same dormitory and partners who met by chance affected his sport participation in the states. In terms of role of significant others, sports sociologists found that people are socialized into sports by significant others such as teachers, peers and family (Coakley, 1993; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010). Furthermore, the motivational climate for sport participation is emphasized by various significant others (Carr & Weigand, 2002). The study showed that immigrants in the states are also motivated by significant others in the process of sport participation in the states. In particular, friends affected Korean immigrants.

In terms of impact of personality, the research indicated that individual personality of immigrants affects the process of sport participation in the states. In particular, the study found that out-going and active personality helps immigrants to have more opportunity for playing sports and exercise. America is new world to immigrants and there are no friends, so their own personality could play significant role to make American friends, particularly, to find partners for sports activities.

Physical environmental was also important factors that facilitate immigrants’ participation in sports in the states. The researcher categorized good league system, facility and its accessibility into environmental support. Environmental factors are becoming increasingly recognized as important via ecological models with constructs such as perceived safety, the availability and accessibility of activity-related facilities (Turrell & Oldenburg, 2003). Principally, sufficient environmental support would be crucial factors that attract Korean immigrants’ participation because most Korean immigrants could not enjoy sports as they do in the states due to lacks of facilities such as gymnasium in Korea.

In terms of psychological well-being, Korean immigrants would like to get psychological benefits from exercise and sports. He wanted to feel enjoyment and achievement through thrill of winning. Furthermore, he would like to see his progress through sports. Many studies reported that exercise and sports is crucial providers for psychological benefits such as enjoyment, self-improvement, achievement, efficacy, and confidence (Frederic & Ryan, 1993; James & Ridinger, 2002). These benefits could be not only outcomes, but also motives for sport participation. The study found that psychological well-being is also predictor that affects immigrants’ participation in sports in the states.

Conflict with cultural change of organization negatively affected Korean immigrant's sport participation. Respondent stated that he loses interest in ATP because of selfish attitude of younger member and member change. Even, he missed happy memories with old members. A participant's psychological commitment and loyalty to a brand results in her/his resistant to change. In this case, brand could be replaced by organizations or sport club where respondent have participated in. As mentioned in findings, respondent have involved in activities of ATP for several years and he is now loyal member of ATP. Consequently, his commitment and loyalty to ATP results in his resistant and conflict to cultural change and member change.

Climate of workplace affected immigrants' involvement in sports. Respondent felt that colleagues do not have interest in sports as he, so he did not want to talk about sports and to try to play with colleagues. The lack of supportive climate at workplace influenced his attitude toward work. Ironically, he wanted colleagues to see him as serious employee who work hard. Furthermore, in this climate, he would like to separate his sports activities from work. Social-cognitive researchers have found that the structure of the motivational climate emphasized by social agents (workplace, community, and school) was crucial factor for sport socialization. Individuals are able to detect this achievement climate from interaction with social agents in achievement contexts (Carr & Weigand, 2002). The study found that lack of motivational climate at workplace could be barrier to block the process of immigrants' sport activities.

The study indicates that economic reasons disturbed immigrants' participation in sports and exercise. For example, when respondent first came to the states, he did not have enough money and time to share with sports. It seems that these constraints are very often happened mostly in the early stage of immigration. According to Iverson, Fielding, Crow and Christensen (1985), the major barriers to regular exercise were lack of time and laziness. Johnson, Corrigan, Dubbert and Gramling (1990) observed that barriers to exercise were lack of time, not enough money, lack of facilities, and lack of exercise partner. In this study, the researcher found that cost and time were major barriers to immigrants' regular exercise. The interesting thing is that exercise partner could be barriers to participants since Korean immigrants could have enough friends and somebody (or social agents) supporting their sport activities. Hence if physical environment (facility, convenience of location) and significant others (partner) were sufficient, immigrant could easily participate in sports.

Consequently, this study found that there are very similar results between social conditions to related to non-immigrants' physical activities (e.g., motives for exercise) and those to related to Korean immigrants' activities. This means that outcomes of previous literatures in the area of sport motivations studies could probably use to anticipate motives of immigrants. However, this study found new emerging intervening variable that block immigrants' participation in sports. That was 'pressure at workplace'. In particular, respondents want people not to see him as sportsmen and they worry about their own image at workplace. This finding implies that motivational climate of social agents and their role could be interest academic issues in the fields of immigrant and sport studies.

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