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PREVIEW

SELF-REVEALING IN KOREAN-AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS AS A
FUNCTION OF THEIR DEGREE OF ACCULTURATION AND
DEPRESSION

by

Charlene Bang

A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Psychology in the
Department of Psychology at Pace University

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ABSTRACT

Understanding cultural diversity within our American population is a challenging process. Psychologists need to consider influencing factors such as acculturation and psychological status (e.g., depression) on immigrants' adjustment to the host country. Korean Americans are one of the fastest growing ethnic populations in the U.S. Despite this increase, there are minimal studies addressing Korean American's adjustment, and no studies of Korean-American adolescents' adjustment process post migration. For most immigrants, there are a number of stressors (e.g. language barriers, discrimination, prejudice) related to immigration which can negatively affect adjustment. As a result, some immigrants may experience psychological distress such as depression. Attempts to overcome this stressful adjustment can lead to different coping strategies such as adapting to the new culture. In contrast, with difficult adjustment, the immigrant can experience acculturative stress. Korean American adolescents may experience increased difficulty with adjustment since they are already facing emotional challenges as they transition from childhood to adulthood. As a result of Korean culture, in which it is ideal for an individual to remain calm even during

stressful times (i.e., immigration) and are possibly experiencing emotional distress, Korean American adolescents may internalize their feelings and not self reveal/self disclose their emotions. As they adapt to the new culture or become acculturated, their tendency to self reveal or self disclose psychological symptoms may increase.

Studies suggest that there are gender differences in willingness to reveal personally relevant information. According to Dogin & Kim (1994), females reveal more than males. One way to study willingness to reveal personal information is by means of self-report measures or questionnaires such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-Adolescent (MMPI-A). The MMPI-A has three scales L, F, and K, that are specifically sensitive to how individuals reveal personal information. The L scale is designed to detect attempts made by adolescents to put themselves in a favorable light. The F scale is designed to detect the adolescent exaggerating symptoms or problems. The K scale is designed to detect defensiveness. These scales (L, F, and K) enabled us to determine in the present study the validity of the MMPI-A when using it with Korean American adolescents.

The present study determined the relationship between acculturation, defined by Suinn-Lew Asian-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA) and self revealing, as defined by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-

Adolescent (MMPI-A's) validity scales, L, F, and K. In addition, effects of depression, as defined by the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) on tendency to reveal was examined. Furthermore, interaction effects between self disclosure, acculturation, and depression were determined. Lastly, gender differences were examined. To study these effects, 79 Korean American adolescents (females: $n=39$; males: $n=40$ between the ages of 12 and 18 from PA., NJ., and NY.) who were either born in (49%) or emigrated to (51%) the U.S., were administered the three scales, the MMPI-A, SL-ASIA, and BDI.

The subjects were recruited through the use of personal and professional contacts. Four Korean American organizations were contacted. Written consent forms were obtained from both the subjects and their guardians. Data were collected through group administrations of the three scales.

Correlation coefficients revealed that there was no relationship between acculturation and willingness to self reveal (MMPI-A L, F, & K). There was no correlation between over reporting (M-F) and depression (BDI), while there was a significant relationship between under reporting (M-L) and depression and between defensiveness (M-K) and depression. More specifically, significant lower scores on BDI were noted with high L and K scores on the MMPI-A. Analysis of variance revealed that there was no significant interaction effects

between acculturation, depression and willingness to self reveal. In addition, no gender differences in willingness to self reveal were observed.

Overall, these results suggests that the MMPI-A is a valid assessment tool to be used with Korean American adolescents as a validity check.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A school psychologist's work with an adolescent involves a careful understanding of the adolescent's development and his/her adjustment to the world around him/her as he/she transitions from childhood to adulthood. Having insight into the adolescent is a difficult task, but it becomes even more challenging when the adolescent is from a culture that is other than the culture of the psychologist working with the adolescent.

It is important for psychologists to understand the role of culture as a factor contributing to the psychologists difficulties when working with their ethnic minority adolescent clients while formulating interventions which will accomplish successful therapeutic outcome.

Understanding multiculturalism has been of interest to many psychologists, especially with an increasing number of immigrants in the United States and thus an increasing number of ethnically different students/adolescents in the schools or communities. Despite this growing number of minority students in the schools and/or communities, psychological services continue to be underutilized by the

minority students and/or adolescents (Yamamoto, 1978).

Psychologists who have worked with minority adolescents have agreed that when working with immigrant adolescents, it is important to be aware of their adjustment to the host country, defining what is an “appropriate/acceptable” way of coping with the transition/immigration to the host country, and how family dynamics differ based upon cultural influences. Since the 1970's, studies about cross cultural variables have increased our understanding of clients and psychologists of different cultural/ethnic backgrounds.

The practice of psychology tends to take a middle-class Anglo-American perspective. Traditional psychological services have developed from a predominantly Western set of values and way of viewing functioning (Sue & Sue, 1990). When working with ethnic minority, an alternative cultural world view needs to be considered in formulating strategies for programs or treatment. Professional-client values need to be examined, and interventions should match the client's expectations for behavior.

The Korean-American mental health have not been studied extensively in the psychological literature and, in fact, are often categorized under the umbrella of Asian-American heritage and mental health. Overall, much of the literature that has been published in this area is based on anecdotes and/or clinical