Abstract: The aim of this qualitative study was to explore 28 Korean American parents' perceptions of parenting. Interview data were audio taped, transcribed, and analyzed using content analysis. Themes that emerged were: Korean parenting constructed in Korea, European American parenting observed in the United States, and resulting reconstruction of Korean American parenting. The findings indicate that Korean American parents’ perceptions of parenting are deeply rooted in the social contexts of where parents were brought up and where parents raise their children. These findings could be used to develop a culturally and linguistically competent parenting program for Korean American parents.

Key Words: Korean Americans, Korean Parenting, American Parenting

KOREAN AMERICAN PARENTS’ RECONSTRUCTION OF IMMIGRANT PARENTING IN THE UNITED STATES

Global migration has resulted in rapid growth of culturally diverse populations in the United States (U.S.). This trend brings challenges to healthcare providers because they often know little about the culturally embedded beliefs and practices of minority populations. Culture is the learned, shared, and inter-generationally transmitted values, beliefs, norms, and ways of living built by a group of people; it guide people’s thinking, decisions, and actions (Leininger, 1988). One of the challenges is related to lack of knowledge of how minority parents change their perceptions and behaviors on parenting.

Culture guides construction of parenting (Harkness & Super, 2002). Parents in different societies develop different kinds of parenting that fit the norms of the cultural context in which they raise children. For example, Korean culture is based on collectivistic Confucianism; parents socialize their children to be passive, obedient, and self-disciplined (Kim, Kim, & Rue, 1997). In contrast, European American culture is based on individualism; parents raise their children to be autonomous, independent, and self-reliant (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995).

When Korean parents, who shaped their parenting in Korea, migrate to America, they face a different kind of parenting. Kim and Hong (2007) found that newer Korean American parents were not familiar with parenting practices common in the U.S. As they adapted to mainstream U.S. society (i.e., through acculturation), they made some changes in their parenting practices that they had developed in Korea and adopted some aspects of European American parenting (Kim & Hong, 2007). However, it is not known how changes in their sociocultural context and resulting acculturation bring forth the modification of Korean American parenting. The aim of this study was to examine how living in cultural dualism guided Korean American parents to reconstruct their parenting. The findings will help healthcare providers who work with racial minority parents understand immigrant parents’ beliefs and practices so that they can provide culturally competent parenting guidance to them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by acculturation framework, individualism, and collectivism. Acculturation is defined as the phenomena of sequential psychological and behavioral changes experienced by individuals as a result of continuous direct contact with others having different cultures (Berry, 2006). It is a dynamic process where immigrants gradually adjust to a new culture (Berry, 2006). Two fundamental issues in acculturation

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are immigrants' maintenance of their heritage culture and their adoption of mainstream culture. The focus of immigrant population in this study is Korean Americans. Generally, Korean Americans who live in the U.S. deal with two cultural ideologies: heritage Confucian collectivism and mainstream individualism.

Collectivism is defined as a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as a part of a group (Triandis, 1994). Norms in collectivistic society include collective identity (i.e., we vs. I), emotional dependence, group solidarity, sharing, duties and obligations, need for stable and predetermined friendship, group decision, and particularism (Hofstede, 1980). In contrast, individualism is defined as a social pattern that consists of individuals who view themselves as loosely associated with groups (Triandis, 1994). Norms in individualistic society include individual initiative (i.e., I vs. we), autonomy, emotional independence, right to privacy, pleasure seeking, financial security, and need for specific friendship, and universalism (Hofstede, 1980).

When people from collectivistic society migrate to individualistic society, they face continuous and direct contact of two cultures, resulting in acculturation. Because culture constructs parenting (Harkness & Super, 2002), the frameworks of collectivism and individualism would help to understand what happens when immigrants' heritage parenting behaviors comes into contact with mainstream parenting behaviors. Further, acculturation framework would help to understand how immigrant parents negotiate between two cultures in the process of reconstructing their parenting.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Two Cultural Ideologies: Korean Collectivism and American Individualism

Korean American parents deal with Korean culture and European American culture. Korean culture is largely influenced by collectivism whereas American culture is mostly based on individualism (Hofstede, 2001). With collectivism, Koreans tend to develop a strong in-group (e.g., family) identity and view the in-group as an extension of the self (Triandis, 1994). This collectivistic tendency is well reflected in Confucianism, which stresses the importance of family. The fundamental philosophy of Confucianism includes clear hierarchical relationships and obedience to authority. This philosophy is deeply embedded in Korean values, customs, morals, social structures, family systems, communication styles, and etiquette (Oak & Martin, 2000). Some traditional family values established under Confucianism are: authority of fathers, wives' obedience to husbands, children's obedience to parents, filial piety, submission of self to family, and high expectations in education.

When Korean families move to the U.S., they encounter individualism (Hofstede, 2001). In the individualistic U.S. society, people are less willing to subordinate their personal goals to those of a group, are willing to confront others, feel personally responsible for their successes and failures, and experience some degree of separation and distance from others (Triandis, 1994). This individualistic tendency is well reflected in the Bill of Rights; its basic tenet is that all people are created equal, and that they have certain God-given rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Oak & Martin, 2000). The democratic tradition also adds to the Americans' expectation that the society protects their individual rights (Oak & Martin, 2000). Some traditional societal values established in U.S. under individualism are justice, fairness, rights, and goals (Triandis, 1994).

Culture and Parenting

All parents try to nurture their children to learn the values and appropriate behaviors for the society their children will live in so that they can become competent adults. Evidence indicates that Korean American parents raise their children differently from European American parents (Kim, Guo, Koh, & Cain, in press; Kim & Hong, 2007). Korean American parents tend to consider their children as extensions of themselves, and as such, assume full responsibility for their children's good and bad behaviors and outcomes (Ahn, 1994). Believing that they know what's best for their children, most parents are extensively involved in the decision-making process for their children from daily routines to choosing a college, profession, and spouse (Lehrer, 1996). For Korean American parents, exercising parental authority is one way of expressing their love for their children (Kim, 2005). Children are raised to be interdependent, obedient to their parents, loyal to the family, and fulfill other aspects of filial piety (Oak & Martin, 2000).

When Koreans migrate to U.S., they face the value of individualism, which is reflected in European American family systems. Compared to Korean families, European American families display more horizontal, democratic, egalitarian relationships among family members (Strom, Park, & Daniels, 1987). In childrearing, there is a social trend toward greater equality of the mothers' and fathers' roles (Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000). European American fathers are more involved with their children compared to Korean fathers (Shwalb, Nakazawa, Yamamoto, & Hyun, 2004). Although European American children have obligations to their families and parents, they also have greater equality with their parents and more independence with less emphasis on obedience than do Korean children. The cultural norm of European Americans is to raise children to be self-directed, self-regulating, and self-sufficient (Holmbeck et al., 1995). Therefore, in the U.S., strict parental control can be seen as an intrusion and inhibition of children's growing autonomy (Pettengill & Rohner, 1985).

Korean American Parenting

Overall, Korean American fathers and mothers have been reported to be warm, accepting, and loving with moderate to firm control (Kim, 2005; Kim & Rohner, 2002; Shrade, 1996). Korean mothers have been shown to interact sensitively with their children by appropriately reading and responding to their children's subtle cues (Kim & Hong, 2007). In a study, Kim and Hong (2007) found that Korean American parents considered spanking/hitting (i.e., harsh discipline) and little hugging/kissing as Korean style parenting. They perceived using a sticker chart, hugging/kissing (i.e., positive discipline), removing/adding privileges, timeouts, and giving chores (i.e., appropriate discipline) as American style parenting. Korean American parents who recently came to U.S. did not know discipline strategies commonly used among European American parents. However, as they become familiar with the U.S. culture and parenting practices, they discontinued what they perceived to be negative aspects of Korean style parenting, such as spanking. They also adopted positive
Table 1. Demographic characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parent (n=29) Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Child (n=25) Mean (SD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>37.18 (3.29)</td>
<td>5.61 (1.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>14.64 (2.18)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Length of US stay</td>
<td>10.00 (5.37)</td>
<td>5.19 (1.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>2.04 (1.55)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family income</td>
<td>&lt;$40,000 - 20%; $40,001 - $80,000 - 46%; &gt;$80,001-18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visa status</td>
<td>Citizens (39%), permanent residents (43%), temporary (18%)</td>
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aspects of American style parenting, such as timeouts (Kim & Hong, 2007).

However, in a follow up study by Kim and others (in press), Korean American mothers and fathers self-reported using more positive and appropriate discipline than harsh discipline. Maternal physical affection, correcting misbehaviors, and reasoning were positively correlated with children’s social competence. Paternal physical punishment (e.g., spanking, hitting, raising arms) was positively correlated with children’s behavior problems (Kim et al., in press). The current study is a second follow-up study by Kim and Hong (2007) using qualitative content analysis. The research question was ‘how has the change in Korean American parents’ sociocultural context and living in cultural dualism guided Korean American parents to reconstruct their parenting?’

METHODS

Participants

Participants were 29 first-generation Korean American parents (25 mothers, 4 fathers) with young children (ages 3 to 8) living in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. Korean Americans in this study were defined as persons born in Korea of ethnic Korean parents, residing in the U.S. at the time of the study. Even though permanent residents and sojourners were not technically Korean Americans, in general, psychologists include them under the term “Korean American” in their research because of the limited number of accessible participants (Uba, 1994). Table 1 summarizes demographic characteristics of the participants. Overall, parents were in their late 30s, received an average of 14 years of education, and had lived in the U.S. on average 10 years. Mean age of their child was 5 and children had lived in U.S. on average 5 years.

Data Collection

The researchers obtained approval from the University Institutional Review Board and obtained informed consent from all study participants. Participants were recruited from Korean language schools and their surrounding communities. Korean American parents were interviewed in the Korean language. They were asked to describe what Korean parenting was, what American parenting was, and what the pros and cons of each type of parenting were. They were also asked about their perceptions of their own style of parenting. The interviews were audio tape-recorded and transcribed in Korean for analysis.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using inductive content analysis (Morgan, 1993; Weber, 1990). First, the researchers independently listened to the audiotapes and read the Korean language transcripts several times to gain a broad understanding of the content. Next, as the first researcher re-read the transcripts, she identified key codes in English and highlighted key quotations related to the research question. Once key codes were identified, she combined all key codes and all highlighted key quotations into one file. In this process, a grid was developed that aligned the key codes on one axis and key quotations on the other. The grid was revised several times to develop an accurate list of key codes derived from the transcripts. Based on the grid, explicit coding and scoring instructions were developed. Then, the second researcher coded all transcripts again using the coding and scoring instructions. The coded quotation grids from the first and second researchers were then combined into one final grid. Interrator reliability was 79%.

The final grid was then carefully read and each researcher independently identified main themes by sorting key codes into groups. This was accomplished by placing the key codes adjacent to each other by interview question category. When each researcher identified themes for each interview question, the two researchers engaged in active dialogue to resolve any discrepancies. In this process, researchers identified major content-related themes by recognizing how interactions between themes and cultural contexts disclose the pattern of reconstruction of Korean American parenting. After extensive discussion, both researchers reached an agreement about the major content-related themes found in the transcripts. Then, the researchers read the interview transcripts again to validate the structure of the content areas against the interview data. Translation of key quotations was done after identifying major content-related themes. This involved not only staying true to the Korean meaning of the words, but also correcting for English grammar.
Table 2. Korean American parents' perceptions of Korean American parenting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Korean parenting constructed in Korea</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Keeping close proximity and frequent physical contact</td>
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<td>2. Parents as the decision maker</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Use of variety of discipline strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. High expectation of educational achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>American parenting observed in the United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Use of positive and appropriate discipline strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Child as the decision maker</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Promotion of individual talent and making learning fun</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resulting reconstruction of Korean American parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Expression of parental affection</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Parental control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Discipline strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Supporting education</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Korean American parents' images of well-adjusted child</td>
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RESULTS

Content-related themes that emerged from the interview data were categorized into three major themes: Korean American parents' perceptions of (a) Korean parenting constructed in Korea, (b) American parenting observed in the U.S., and (c) reconstruction of Korean American parenting.

Korean Parenting Constructed in Korea

The first major theme that emerged was Korean American parents' perceived Korean parenting constructed in Korea. All parents stated that they learned Korean parenting as children from their parents. Korean American parents acknowledged that although they live in America, they raise their children the same way their parents raised them. Korean American parents' perceptions of Korean parenting can be summarized in four domains: (a) keeping close proximity with frequent physical contact, (b) parents as the decision maker, (c) use of a variety of discipline strategies, and (d) high expectation for educational achievement.

Keeping close proximity with frequent physical contact.

Korean American parents thought that, in Korean parenting, parents did not express affection freely to their children. However, they described their parenting as keeping close proximity with frequent physical contact with their children at home. Parents, especially mothers, reported carrying their children on their back or in their arms and co-sleeping. Children also did not want to be separated from parents at night. Parents gave frequent physical contact and affection to their children while they slept with them. A mother commented:

>I like children. I hug and give physical contact. I raised both my children by carrying them on my back and holding them in my arms. I give them a lot of hugs and kisses while I sleep with them at night. My children like it very much.

Parents as the decision maker.

Korean American parents perceived that they were exclusive decision makers for their children. They made decisions based on what they perceived as best for the children regarding their children's daily lives including education, studying, playing, and feeding. They also expected immediate compliance. If parents perceive something as 'not good for their child,' they did not let the child do it regardless of what the child thinks. A mother stated:

>Probably because of how I grew up, I parent in Korean style; I always need to demand my child to read books, study, and do homework. For homework, when he takes off his backpack, I check with him whether or not he has any homework. I make him do homework first and then watch TV. I do it in Korean style.

Use of a variety of discipline strategies to correct misbehaviors.

Parents perceived that in Korean parenting, they continuously monitor and correct children's behaviors by appraising whether they are meeting the parents' expectations or standards. Correcting and controlling children's misbehaviors was regarded as the responsibility of parents because they wanted to shape their children's good behaviors. One parent states, "A three-year-old's habit goes to eighties; if parents do not correct it now, it may not be corrected."

When children's behaviors do not meet parental expectations, parents tend to use a variety of discipline strategies to correct them. These strategies usually start with negative comments several times. If the child does not respond, parents use other strategies that are incremental in harshness such as yelling, threatening, and requiring children to raise hands up in the air, to spanking. Some parents recognized that they develop the habit of yelling because it leads to the immediate result of stopping the child’s misbehaviors. Most parents believed corporal punishment is ultimately justified for the child's sake, as this one mother stated, "In fact, Korean education says 'spank when discipline is needed.' Therefore, I spank my child on the buttocks, but with a loving-hand, not striking to bruise."

High expectations for educational achievement.

Korean American parents perceived that in Korean parenting, parents put high expectations on their children for achievement in academic and extracurricular activities (e.g., music, art, and martial art). Parents scheduled daily and weekly routines around academic and extracurricular activities and expected their children to attain beyond their age and grade level. Parents also provided their children intensive out-of-school studies and tutoring, with expectation for their children to learn and memorize a large volume of knowledge in a short time period (i.e., cramming education and intensive rote learning). Even in extracurricular activities such as piano or swimming, training was intensive. A mother said, "Korean style is something like Spartan style; teaching 5 days a week, 2 hours each day, rather than teaching once a week. Children master the stuff in a short time, whether it is learning piano or swimming."

Parents thought that they had high expectations because it was the way they grew up. However, this kind of high expectations sometimes creates a strain between the parent and the child, as this father commented:
American Parenting Observed in the United States

Korean American parents in this study reported that they were directly and indirectly exposed to American parenting by observing their children's school teachers, television, neighbors, and other Korean American mothers. Several parents stated that they were not quite sure what exactly European American parenting was because they did not have a chance to talk about child rearing with American parents. They mostly learn American parenting from other Korean parents. Korean parents' perceptions of American parenting were perceived in three domains: (a) use of positive and appropriate parenting, (b) child as the decision maker, and (c) promotion of individual talent and making learning fun.

Use of positive and appropriate parenting strategies. Korean American parents observed that American parents freely and publicly praised children when their children do a small thing well. They also perceived that European American parents explained and reasoned with a soft voice until the child understood, talked about consequences of actions, and talked about what was wrong and why it was wrong. In addition, Korean American parents perceived that European American parenting used rewards and consequences based on rules. A mother commented, "American parenting is following rules and giving lots of punishments and rewards: timeouts, prohibiting a favorite TV program, taking away favorite toys, not letting children meet friends, or using sticker charts to encourage children with small things."

Child as the decision maker. Korean American parents perceived that European American children make their own decisions. They thought that European American parents listened to and respected individual children's opinions and promoted self-reliance by giving them opportunities to be the decision maker. European American parenting practices also involved letting children be responsible for their own work. Korean parents' perceived that these kinds of parenting behaviors place European American parents and children in a horizontal relationship, in which they respect each other's opinions, as opposed to a hierarchical one. A mother said, "American parenting is parents listening to children and saying, 'do it if you want to.' In this way, parents are on the children's side."

Promotion of individual talent and making learning fun. Korean American parents perceived that European American parenting was more focused on promoting each individual child's talent, rather than just academic achievement. A father said, "In Korea, knowledge, such as knowing a lot and calculating pluses and minuses well, is the first priority. I like that these things are not stressed in the U.S." Korean American parents perceived that European American parenting was more focused on promoting each individual child's talent because parents respect their children as individual human beings. Korean American parents viewed that effective learning in America was focused on easy, fun, and practical instruction. Another mother commented:

I helped my child with a math question. I told him to solve the question in my way. He said, 'Dad, I am not in college but a first grader. I think you are wrong in pushing me to perform at a college level. I will do it myself.' On one hand, I was very sorry because a father has his role and I did not know it well. I pushed my child as I was pushed as a child. On the other hand, I was very proud of him.

When it comes to education, I think American style is good as it does not force children. Those who like studying can study. And if parents or teachers find their children to have a special talent in art or music, such a talent is intensively supported.

Reconstruction of Korean American Parenting

When Korean American parents were exposed to European American parenting, they started to reconstruct Korean American parenting, to better fit with living in double cultural contexts. In this process, Korean American parents evaluated pros and cons of both parenting models and tried out new behaviors that they thought might lead to their children having better outcomes. Reconstruction was noted in (a) expression of parental affection, (b) parental control, (c) discipline strategies, (d) supporting education, and (e) Korean American parents' images of a well-adjusted child.

Expression of parental affection. Parents evaluated the effect of expression of parental affection and praising of children. A mother observed praising behaviors displayed by teachers and said, "American teachers praise children unconditionally. Children who grow up with unconditional praise would not go wrong. I think American education is better for children's human nature." As a result, Korean American parents perceived that they learned how to express their love more generously. Parents also acknowledged that they were praising their children more. A mother stated:

Although we live in the U.S., we do something similar to what our parents did to us. Our parents' generation did not hug us affectionately or say 'I love you.' However, I follow American society a little bit in expressing our love to children.

Parental control. Parents perceived that a positive aspect of Korean parental control (i.e., parents as the decision maker) was teaching children to be submissive, to break stubbornness, and to learn compromise. Parents wanted their children to learn to compromise by realizing that they could not do everything in their own way. Parents perceived that negative aspects of Korean parenting being intrusive and ignoring children's opinions and demanding absolute submission, which might make children develop a lack self-regulation and an inability to make independent decision. A mother said, "The negative aspect of Korean parenting is being authoritarian. I think it is bad if adults misuse their authority and ignore a child's opinion just because they are teachers, parents, or older."

Korean American parents perceived that the positive aspect of European American parental control (i.e., children as the decision maker) is respecting children as independent individuals with dignity. This promotes children's self-assertion and will-power as they can think rationally about their opinion, clearly communicate pros and cons, do as they want and face consequences. Korean American parents also perceived that European American parenting practice included making an effort to patiently listen to the child's opinions and thereby resolving underlying reasons for dissatisfaction. Some parents thought that the different styles between home and school might confuse their children. As a result, Korean American parents raised children in the way they did in Korea and added what they learned about European American parenting. Most of all, parents tried to be patient, listen, and reflect their children's...
opinions. A father stated, “I don’t know for sure, yet, but I want to reflect the will of my child. If he says, ‘Dad, I want to do this,’ then, it will be good if we discuss it.”

**Discipline strategies.** Korean American parents had mixed views on the effect of the Korean model of misbehavior management. Some parents realized that although spanking had an immediate effect, it might not have long-term effectiveness. Spanking also is forceful and threatening, which may not have the desired results on the children. They also heard that spanking was prohibited in the US; mothers heard that school teachers inspect children for spanking marks and the police visit homes, checking for incidents. Parents perceived that the negative aspects of Korean model of misbehavior management were ignoring children’s opinions and demanding absolute submission, which may be unfair and lead children to be less able to form their own opinion, become more defiant, and be more confused. A father stated:

> A child would get stressed from feeling frustrated and rejected. If it lasts a long time, he may feel uncomfortable and avoid communicating with his parents because his needs are not met. This may lead him to be defiant, exactly what worries parents.

As a result, many Korean American parents perceived that they should stop spanking. Instead of spanking, parents tried using timeouts, removing privileges, explaining, and reasoning. Korean American parents perceived that reasoning and timeout will let children calm down and think about their misbehaviors, which will prevent the children from getting their feelings hurt. Therefore, parents thought that timeouts were sometimes necessary. One mother said, “I hear a lot from other Korean mothers about what to do when a child misbehaves such as timeouts, not letting the child do what he likes to do, making clear rules, or no means no. But they are hard to do.” Other mothers stated, “I think timeouts are necessary sometimes. So, I think it would be good if I use American parenting and Korean physical punishment in half and half;” “I explain the situation in detail to my children and tell them what was wrong and why it was wrong; I mostly do it in American style.”

**Supporting education.** Korean American parents evaluated the pros and cons of intensive rote learning versus promoting individual talent. Some parents preferred cramming education because it made children learn fast. Other parents disliked it because it would prevent children from developing critical thinking skills and decision making ability, making children’s responses mechanical, and prohibiting children from playing and overworking them. Meanwhile, parents thought that American education, which focused on promoting an individual child’s talent, helped children to enjoy learning. Parents thought that in America, parents and teachers try to accept and support their children as individuals regardless of their academic achievement. Parents perceived that because American model of learning gave children time to think and know who they are, it would enable children to be critical thinkers, which helped them become confident, independent, and rich in originality. After evaluating both models, parents came up with their own idea of education that mixes both types. One mother said, “Especially, I think it would work better if children attend elementary and middle school in Korea because in some way cramming education is better than American education which is slow.”

**Korean American parents’ image of the well-adjusted child.** In the process of negotiating two models of parenting, Korean American parents developed an image of the well-adjusted Korean American child as well as good qualities to develop in their children. These qualities included being physically healthy, socially competent, positive, honest, sincere, religious, joyful, free, and satisfied. A mother said:

> I want my child to be happy, healthy, and positive - not twisted - and make good human relationships. It would be good to have about middle grades; it would be a problem if he does really badly. I also hope that he is healthy, not sick, and does not harm others.

**DISCUSSION**

Cultural competence for healthcare providers is a process in which they continuously attempt to achieve the ability to effectively work within client’s cultural context (Andrews, 2003). To provide minority parents with culturally competent guidance in parenting healthcare providers need to have understanding on minority parents' perceptions and practices related to parenting.

Recently, Kim and Hong (2007) found that Korean American parents categorized certain discipline strategies as either Korean or American style. Following those findings, this study explored how living in cultural dualism guided Korean American parents to reconstruct their parenting. Overall, the content-related themes revealed from this study supported Kim and Hong’s previous findings. The study also expanded our understanding of Korean American parenting. The three themes emerging from this study illustrated Korean American parents’ reconstruction of Korean American parenting after they had evaluated the pros and cons of Korean parenting constructed in Korea and American parenting observed in the U.S.

The first reconstruction was noted in the expression of parental affection. The finding that Korean American parents expressed affection is somewhat inconsistent with Kim and Hong’s (2007) finding that they lack expression of affection. This contradictory finding may be related to (a) the study design, (b) public vs. private behavior, and (c) different samples’ characteristics. First, the discrepancy may be related to different study design. Kim and Hong’s (2007) study specifically asked Korean American parents what they thought about hugging and kissing, whereas the current study asked broader questions regarding their perceptions of Korean and American parenting. When Korean American parents were asked specifically about hugging and kissing they had a chance to compare themselves to what they observed among European Americans and thought that they lacked in expression of affection. However, in a subsequent study, when Korean American parents reported their parenting using a Likert-scale survey, they scored higher in positive and appropriate discipline than in harsh discipline (Kim et al., in press), which is consistent with the finding of the present study. On the other hand, the finding might be related to the difference between public and private expression of affection in Korean American families. It is highly probable that Korean parents express their affection more while they co-sleep with their children than when in public with them. This inconsistency might also be related to participants’
length of stay in the U.S.; participants of the current study lived in the U.S. for an average of 10 years (range 1–24) whereas the participants in Kim and Hong's (2007) study lived in the U.S. for 8 years (range 2–15). Both Kim and Hong's study and the current study found that Korean American parents learned to express affection more freely the longer they were exposed to U.S. culture and parenting. After negotiating pros and cons of Korean and American parenting, Korean American parents expressed their affection more freely and used more praise. The finding of the present study, along with Kim et al.'s (in press) finding, lead us to reinterpret Korean American parenting to be warm and affectionate.

Second, reconstruction was noted in the practice of parental control. In Korean parenting, parents considered themselves the sole decision maker for their children. This belief leads these parents to be extensively involved in directing all aspects of their children's lives. This finding is consistent with previous anecdotal evidence (Lehrer, 1996). Korean American parents tend to consider their children extensions of themselves, and as such, assume full responsibility for their children's good and bad behaviors and outcomes (Ahn, 1994). In addition, Korean American parents consider this extensive involvement as a way of expressing their love for their children (Chao & Tseng, 2002; Kim, 2005).

Parents as sole decision makers is strongly supported by collectivistic social norms in Korea, which predetermines each family member's roles and obligations (Triandis, 1994) and dictates absolute parental authority as stressed in Confucianism. Because both parental authority and the predetermined role for children are supported by the whole Korean society, Korean parents usually do not need to have rules specific to their family. However, having pre-determined norms based on Korean culture may confuse children of Korean American parents who may not understand the different social norms between home and school where children spend most of their days.

Korean American parents need to understand that American society does not back up their role as the absolute decision maker. In this perspective, it is desirable that parents perceive that children make their own decision in the American parenting context. It is also desirable that, after reviewing pros and cons of both parenting styles, Korean American parents try to listen and discuss their children's opinions with them. European Americans practice individualism where people are relatively free to do what they think is best for them (Triandis, 1994), and family roles are less determined by society. Therefore, European American parents need to set their own rules to exercise their authority and to establish family structure. What is not clear from the finding is whether or not Korean American parents are aware that European American children make their own decisions within the limits set by parents and teachers.

The third reconstruction was noted in discipline strategies to manage misbehaviors. Korean American parents perceived that Korean parenting consists of a variety of discipline strategies including negative commands, yelling, threatening, and spanking. This finding is congruent with Kim and Hong's (2007) previous study results. According to the Coercive Family Process Model (Patterson, 1982; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992), parents unintentionally reinforce children's misbehaviors by paying negative attention to them when they coerce the child to stop the behavior. When parents ignore children's misbehaviors and give positive attention (e.g., hug, kiss, praise, and rewards) to desired behaviors, parents can effectively decrease misbehaviors while promoting appropriate behaviors (Webster-Stratton, 2002). In a pilot-test, teaching Korean American parents how to use positive parenting increased their use of it after the intervention (Kim, Cain, & Webster-Stratton, 2008).

In contrast, Korean American parents perceived that European American parenting used appropriate discipline (i.e., reasoning/timeouts/rules) to control children's misbehaviors. Korean American parents learned these practices by observing teachers, neighbors, and television. After evaluating pros and cons of both Korean and American parenting, parents stopped spanking and tried timeouts, removing privileges, explaining, and reasoning.

In a recent study that taught positive and appropriate discipline strategies to Korean American mothers, the average use of positive discipline increased but not the use of appropriate discipline after the intervention (Kim et al., 2008). However, within the intervention group mothers, those who had adopted more American culture increased the use of appropriate discipline than those who had adopted less American culture. In contrast, those who had adopted less American culture decreased use of harsh discipline more than mothers who had adopted more American culture. This evidence suggests Korean American parents are influenced by European American parenting regardless of the level of their acculturation, but more acculturation results in more use of appropriate discipline. Also, it is necessary to find other ways for parents to manage children's misbehaviors when they decrease spanking.

Reconstruction was noted regarding the support of education. Korean parents had high expectations for their children's educational achievement. The emphasis on academic achievement may be related to their Confucian philosophy that stressed the importance of learning (Lee, 2004). In addition, the education of their offspring is seen as a status symbol and emphasis is placed on children's achieving high grades so they can get into prestigious schools. Many parents believe that a degree from a prestigious university will lead their children to high-paying professional jobs, attracting better spouses, and ensuring a stable family life. Therefore, most Korean American parents sacrifice themselves, their time, and their money for their children's education (Lee, 2004).

Meanwhile, parents perceived that European American parenting focused on fostering individual children's talent because parents respect their children as unique individuals who are independent and autonomous. This perception is consistent with the individualistic social context of the U.S. Korean American parents perceived that the European American style of supporting education promoted children's critical thinking, creativity, and individual talent. Because education in the home environment and education in the U.S. school system are so incongruent, Korean American parents worried that their children might be confused. These parents would benefit from learning about cultural differences and expectations between Korean and American cultures so that they can help reduce their children's confusion.

Finally, the reconstruction of Korean American parenting can be summarized with parents' desire to develop good
qualities in their children and their image of the well-adjusted child. After reviewing and negotiating pros and cons of both Korean and American parenting, parents developed the image of well-adjusted Korean American children who live in double cultures. In creating this image, parents have put an emphasis on raising well-rounded children. The development of this image may not only be related to what Korean American parents observed among European American children, but also may relate back to the doctrine of education for the whole person as proposed by the Korean King Kojong in 1895 (Edunet, 2008). In this doctrine, intellectual training, moral training, and physical education were emphasized in reaction to Confucian philosophy that stressed only the intellectual aspect of learning. Although contemporary Korean society theoretically maintains its focus on raising well-rounded children (Edunet, 2008), it is hard to achieve in current Korean society because academic achievement is seen as vital for social advancement. It is more realistic to nurture well-rounded children in the U.S. than in Korea.

CONCLUSION

Minority parents may more readily follow the suggestions of healthcare providers who understand how minority parents change their perceptions and behaviors on parenting as they adopt the U.S. culture. The strength of this qualitative study is finding Korean American parents’ perceptions of parenting are deeply rooted in the social context of not only where they were brought up but also where they raise their children. It also expands previous findings of Kim and Hong (2007) and Kim et al. (in press), and our understanding of Korean American parents’ perceptions of parenting. A study limitation is the lack of conformability of the results because they were from a small unrepresentative sample and were not validated with study participants.

Healthcare providers, school teachers, and parents can use this study’s findings to better understand the process of Korean American parenting developed with acculturation and provide culturally sensitive recommendations. For example, healthcare providers can educate Korean American parents about the importance of using more positive reinforcement of desired behaviors instead of negative reinforcement of undesired behaviors. School teachers need to assess the Korean American children’s ability to make own decisions and be autonomous. Korean American children whose parents always make decisions for them may become confused about teachers’ expectations; teachers may need to guide children in making their own decisions at school. Korean American parents need to understand the cultural differences that their children are facing between home and school environment. This awareness may help parents to choose what would be best for their children. Society at large, especially healthcare providers and teachers who work with other Asian immigrants, can use this study’s findings due to cultural similarities among Asian immigrant populations.

Future research need to expand the findings from this study that parenting is not only constructed and but also reconstructed when social context changes. The findings can be used in developing a Korean American parenting program. This program may include ways to promote Korean American parents’ expression of parental affection, effective control, appropriate discipline strategies, and understanding of cultural differences between Korea and America. Second, the findings can be used in developing a questionnaire that assesses Korean American parents’ reconstruction of parenting. This questionnaire can be used to assess the effectiveness of the Korean American parenting program.

REFERENCES


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