Josie Kang

"A Document"

http://www.diversitylab.uiuc.edu/abstracts_lrs2002.yi2.html

I chose to look at the abstract of “Ethnic/Racial Identity Formation and Leisure Behavior among Korean Immigrants” available at the Diversity Research Laboratory website.

First, the title of the project implicates that there are specific ethnic/racial identity formation and leisure behavior among Korean immigrants that are either quantifiable or assessable through scientific or otherwise technical measures. The title also implies a comparative perspective on two levels at least that can shed light, first, on the difference between ethnic Koreans and other groups and also on the differences within the ethnic Korean community. There was, however, a wrong impression that I got from the title as well. That is, I looked forward to reading especially about media consumption of ethnic Koreans in the U.S from the phrase “leisure behavior.” (Perhaps I was too hopeful/eager to find answers to my inquiries too soon and too easily.)

Having done a formal research, this document employs and refers to statistics, former studies, comparative data, and research methods. The study justifies its project further by drawing attention to the relative lack of research being done despite of its growing importance (“43% increase of the Asian Americans’ population… during the 1990s”). The research also critiques the existing scholarship that largely “consider[s] the racial/ethnic categories as fixed and natural independent variables.” In other words, the study proposes to “explore the critical role that leisure…. plays in the construction and persistence of ethnic/racial identity” (my italics). I, however, am not very convinced that the study explored fully the category of leisure as a formative element of ethnic/racial identity. Perhaps I am not satisfied with the definition of leisure merely as that which “takes places in some social context and social interaction.” Such a definition, however valid, seems rather too broad (i.e. it risks categorizing any social interaction as “leisure”).

My disappointment with the definition of leisure results inevitably in my dissatisfaction with the research findings. The “continuum between ‘Korean-Koreans’ and ‘Korean-Americans’,” first of all, refers to no specific leisure activities. Instead, the study bifurcates the two categories by a linguistic or rhetorical analysis (e.g. primary language, “Confucian,” groupist, etc.). I see that language can play an important role in the leisure behavior of the immigrants, but the study does not answer what happens in terms of the actual leisure activities. The second analysis looks at the formal social context in which immigrants experience racism or discrimination (e.g. difficulty in getting a promotion, etc.). The study concludes that social (as opposed to personal) racism constructs the
racial-consciousness of immigrants and discourages them from interacting with members of other racial/ethnic groups. Although this might be true, it appears to overlook other aspects such as biased opinions if not an outright racism that Koreans might have against other ethnic groups. The part about gender is, too, not directly related to leisure and rather generalizes how men and women view members of other racial/ethnic groups.

The part about class was most interesting for me because the economic means of each immigrant prescribes the kind of leisure activities that one can enjoy (unlike how one’s language preference and experiences inadvertently render him or her “closed” and even biased, according to the research findings). All in all, however, I appreciated the research and wished that the document included some of the actual conversations that it analyzed. Perhaps that would have helped me give the study more credit than I have given here. I think a follow-up (rather than a whole new one) research using a different set of questions might reveal more interesting findings about the relationship between leisure and ethnic/racial identity formation.

Eric Hovey

iLab Assignment One


The article I selected for this assignment was written by Mr. Peter Choe, associated with the “Resource Center for Ethnic Youth and Young Adult Evangelization,” and deals with the Korean-American Catholic population in the United States. In order to agree [not necessarily the point] with the text, it is important to first consult some of the facts that the author cites in the opening of his article: there are roughly one million Koreans in the United States and of these there are 7-8% who identify themselves as Roman Catholics. In short, though most Korean-Americans affiliate with Protestant/Evangelical Christian faiths, a sizeable portion nonetheless identify themselves as Catholic. Furthermore Illinois hosts a sizeable Korean-American population and, vicariously, a significant minority of Korean Catholics.

This population is relevant to the discussion of Korean America for several reasons: obviously given the large Korean population on campus, it would follow that there are many Catholics in their number, but more importantly, because of the information that Korean Catholics “have been subject to criticism because of their unwillingness to mingle with other communities.” Important argument Indeed the very usage of language throughout the article is implicit in this fact, in that it carries a tone of factual detachment, almost of writing of a minority community within a minority community [this sentence is a bit confused, but I get your point]. It would seem that Korean Catholics are detached not only from their immigrant community at large by reason of religion, but their very faith itself, as so many of their religious leaders come not from communities in the United States but the Church in Korea. This theme is often repeated within the article, with mention of how (Korean) Church building in America is
lay-dominated [an important stress], allowing for priests to be brought in from the “homeland” and the Mass given “all in the mother tongue.” Thus, the Korean American Catholic community is described in language that presents itself as both significant in understanding the Korean diaspora, but also of a highly isolated (in what sense?)and unique population [good].

This seems almost contradictory, that so ostensibly set-apart and removed a community could be so important, but the fact is that within the Church, “devotional activities and Catholic movements are widely practiced by Koreans.” [so...] Essentially, though said Korean Americans may be isolated from both the traditional Catholic community at large, within their Churches [or within the Catholic church more broadly?] they are highly active. They maintain strong involvements with such organizations as the Legion of Mary and Charismatic Renewal, while simultaneously managing to be detached from the American Catholic population [Ok, not what I juts wrote above] [sometimes gets confusing whether you are suggesting that they are highlighting their isolation from Korean (Protestant) America or Catholic America at large] as a whole. It is this seeming conundrum within the Korean American Catholic community that I find highly fascinating and would like to research even more in depth.

As a practicing Roman Catholic myself, I have found almost an exact 180 degrees set of circumstances within the mainstream Catholic Church, in that while it is more open and accessible (through the adoption of English and sometimes Spanish masses) than the Korean Catholic Church, lay involvement [meaning exactly?] among members is generally much less active. The situation then is one of a larger, more lackadasical (American) Catholic population versus a smaller, more driven (Korean American) Catholic population [OK, at least a good place to start]. It is my wish to study and research the interactions (if any) between these two groups and explore whatever commonalities or differences that may be present. Furthermore, I would like to examine the Korean Catholic community on campus more in-depth and attempt to relate my own position as a Catholic to their experience(s) at large.