I am a Senior at the University of Illinois majoring in Consumer Economics and Finance. I grew up in the Northwest Suburbs of Chicago and am from a Korean family. I am a second-generation Korean that has experienced the pressures of the "status symbol" as well as the "luxurious" lifestyle that is unspoken in a Korean family. I come from a very assimilated Korean household that still values Korean tradition and culture. Growing up I noticed my family's love for cars and realized that I had a different lifestyle than my non-Korean friends. My family shaped who I am and I always have identified myself as a Korean-American.

Keywords: materialism, korean, lifestyle, status

Abstract: This project investigates the relationship between Koreans and Luxurious Cars. The evidence reflects through observation and interview that there is a correlation between Koreans and luxurious cars compared to non-Koreans. Furthermore, the difference between cars in Koreans (1.5 generation) and Korean-Americans is also reflected. Koreans have been characterized as having a love for luxurious material possessions and this project supports the theory in one of the most important status symbols possible.

Question: "Early Question" - 9/19/07 I think an early question that I would like to explore and also would be able to explore is the question or topic of "Korean American Materialism and Status." Growing up in the Northwest Suburbs of Chicago as well as traveling many times to Los Angeles, some of the largest hubs of "korean community," I can't help but notice that Korean Americans are into materialism and status more intently than other races. During high school, I felt as though, you were cool/uncool based on the car you drove and what kind of clothes you wore, and as you got older, this only got more extreme. So, for example, what do the non-Korean upper-middle class kids think of Korean Kids? I feel like my topic is not very focused yet because I am trying to get in a groove to be politically correct and not offend anyone. Loosely, my topic/early question addresses the korean-american culture in America focusing on the things Korean-American Kids get from their parents easily but with what drawbacks it comes with. (*16 year old Korean Girl gets a Pretty White Lexus IS250AWD but parents expect her to keep up her Valedictorian Ranking and go to a big school, like Harvard or Yale. The Ivies) "Question" - 10/3/07 How is Materialism more prevalent among Korean American's compared to other Asians?
Furthermore, how are the Korean American Students (18+) in appearance compared to their non-Korean peers? Do certain types of Korean American Students hang out with those that are on similar "luxurious" levels?

**Plan:**  
"Initial Plan" - 10/3/07 I would initially start my research, with observations around the University. I want to look closely at FAR because, having lived in the FAR/PAR area myself, I know that this dorm is highly dominated by Korean American students. At FAR I would want to observe, most likely on high traffic days like Friday (late afternoon/evenings), Saturdays, and Sundays, what kind of cars KA Students drive, what kind of clothes they are wearing (designer (7forAllMankind, True Religion, LV) vs. normal (A&F, GAP)), to Accessories and styling. Next I will want to separate and Identify (in my opinion) the "luxurious" and the "normal" groups of the KA Students I observe. While observing, I want to also interview KA students and ask specific questions that are set beforehand and also standard questions I will ask every student I interview. These questions will help me show the differences, if any, between KA students and non-KA students. I want to attend Asian American functions also, to see how other Asian Students look, and if they are like KA students in materialism. Lastly, I want to look at the KA Students at CFC (Covenant Fellowship Church), where materialism should not be as prevalent with "church going" students. I will also observe and interview these students as well as the NON-KA students. After I have conducted my observations, interviews, and hopefully get pictures, I want to compile a spreadsheet like report so that the differences and similarities can be visually seen. With this, I would then like to summarize what I learned and if there really is a prevalence of materialism among KA Students more than any other Asian group.

"Plan" - October 25, 2007

I have revised my plan by adding small extras, like interviewing people from UIUC but have moved on to graduate schools also, but have attended UIUC previously. I will continue observations and basic informal interviews as well as semi-formal interviews as the time progresses.

**Data (observation):**  
"Data Observation" - 10/11/07 Over the past week, I've taken time to go and look around campus. I did not necessarily look for Asian Americans or Koreans, but I started to take notes on what kind of cars all students drove, and took a log. However, I then took logs of the cars my Korean friends drove in my Northwest Suburban area, when I went home this weekend, the differences in Chicago as well as at UIUC are very interesting. On top of which, I loosely asked my Korean friends the same basic (two) questions, "What was your first car? Was it new?" I
decided, as far as this point, I would not document their identity, and kept it informal, to support my observations. For the University, Non-Korean students mainly drove big American manufactured cars, the top three for guys being (not in order), Ford Mustang, Ford/Dodge Truck, Dodge Intrepid. I did not take down years of the models, but from the styles, I could tell most of them were in the 3-5 years of age. Next, non-Korean girls top three cars were, Honda Civic, Toyota Corolla, VW Jetta. The interesting thing to note, is that in both observations, the girls always tended to have "newer" looking models/styles, and most of them looked fairly new, in the 2-4 years of age. Korean students also had a separation, FOBS vs. 2nd Generation. Although I did not ask specifically if these student car owners were Fobs or 2nd Generation, being Korean myself (2nd generation), I can tell by looking, if they are either. 2nd generation Korean students at the University guys and girls had similar data. In both genders, the top three most driven cars were the Honda Civic, Honda Accord, and Toyota Camry, (VW Jetta's are also part of the top three for girls) most of them brand new and most, no older than 2004. Fobs on the other hand, have seem to jump up a level of luxury in car ownership, the top three cars for Fob males were, Infiniti G35coupe, BMW M3, Lexus IS350. I specified in this instance due to the fact that the observation and distinction were so clear. All cars were brand new, and most if not all were white if not silver in color. Fob females also were on that upper eschilon for cars. The top three cars were Lexus IS250AWD, BMW 3series, Lexus RX350. The fob group clearly are all investing in cars above and beyond the normal student. The price ranges for non-korean students in cars ranged (MSRP from Consumer Reports Fall 2007 guide) from $12,000-$23,500. For the Korean students, the range was $15,000-$30,000. Lastly, the Fobs students' range was $27,000-$52,000. This is clearly a jump from the non-korean student. For my suburban observation, I could not separate from gender, but I noticed my 2nd generation friends drove Honda civics, accords, and Acura TSX. My FOB friends still fit into my University observation with Lexus IS250/350 being the top runner, followed by the BMW 3series. When I informally asked a few non-korean students around FAR (mostly Freshman) what their first car was, most of them just said it was a hand-me-down from older siblings, most of which were standard American cars, the most mentioned being the Ford Taurus. When I asked a few 2nd Generation korean students what their first cars were, the most popular answer was Honda Civic Coupe, new. Lastly, I asked a few Fob students what their first cars were and the answers were not as common. Most of the Fob students' first cars were the ones they were driving now on campus, the Lexus/BMW. Most of these students have drivers in Korea because traffic is so awful. However, the few Fob students who did have cars in Korea said their first cars were a Samsung (Not sold in the US but is a luxury car) Car, new, that was supposed to be thought of as a training
car. My friends in Chicago, still followed the trend of the 2nd generation Korean students' cars, Honda, new, as their first cars. I've decided to observe the materialism, other than cars, this week and add to this observation. Throughout my observation, I noticed that Korean students were able to afford things on a higher budget than non-Korean students. I do not know the reasoning but my assumption is that Korean parents earn more than the average American adult. I haven't researched this but to prove/disprove my assumption, I want to find out. This was a big eye-opener, but not a surprise.

**Data (interview):**

October 23, 2007 - Interview #1

I interviewed a friend of mine who is a senior at Cornell. She transferred there her sophomore year for Hotel Management, but was born and raised in Illinois and used to go to UIUC. She wanted for me to keep her identity/name hidden due to the details of the interview and the nature of our relationship/in-depth questions.

Chloe*(changed name) is a second generation Korean-American. Her father immigrated here in the early 70’s when he escaped from North Korea. Out of his 7 brothers and sisters, he was the only one who escaped. Chloe’s parents met in South Korea in the year before their immigration. Chloe’s parents had always had big business dreams in mind, but with only $500 dollars that they arrived with, starting a business was very hard. Chloe is the youngest and only girl of the family; she has two older brothers with age differences of 15 and 13 years. Chloe grew up like most of the people around her neighborhood. As a child she took equestrian lessons, had her own horse, took figure skating, and went to a “winter” house in California during Christmas time or went skiing in Colorado. She grew up in a very affluent home.

When Chloe was 15, her father, who had successfully turned his $500 dollars into a $1Billion dollar industry had promised her a car. On her 16th birthday, a brand new shiny Carbon Gray BMW X5 4.8i was waiting for her in the driveway of her home with a big red bow. The Beamer was her first car. This car was in its second year of production and the gray color had been the new introduced color with a waiting list of 3 months. The X5 SUV came in 3 types, depending on the engine, 3.0i, 4.4i, and 4.8i. Chloe got the best X5 possible fully loaded with the new GPS Navigation system (June 2000). In 2000, the BMW 4.8i X5 fully loaded with the GPS Navigation System was approximately $65,000. (Base MSRP: $48,000 with no options)

When Chloe got accepted to Cornell University’s prestigious Hospitality and Hotel Management program during the fall of her sophomore year here at the University of Illinois, her parents offered her a new car as a
reward. Still in love with her X5, she decided to wait. As she approached graduation this past May, her parents talked to her about changing her car again. Now that the car was pretty old, she agreed. She is officially graduating this December; however, she decided to walk in the ceremony at Cornell this past May. When she got home for summer break, Chloe had another surprise. A brand new 2007 BMW 750Li, silver, with black leather interior, fully loaded, yet again. This time, the car was approximately $85,000.

First car: 2000 BMW X5 4.8i - NEW  
Second car: 2007 BMW 750Li - NEW

Analysis: Analysis

November 1, 2007

For my project, out of the readings, the reading that struck the heart of my research, was from Professor Kwon's "Autoexoticizing: Asian American Youth and the Import car Scene." The article centers mainly around the exoticism and group formalities and characteristics of the import car scene, with its Asian models and souped up cars, however, the general idea, that Asian American Youth have an interest in cars, is the main reason why this article was in sync with my research.

The article shows the correlation between Asian American Youth and their fascination with cars and the exotic nature that the scene brings, although not all Asian American Youth pour their souls out into customizing their cars, as my observations and interviews have proved, Asian American Youth, or in this case, Korean American youth along with their parents have a "soft spot" for high priced (either base or with modifications) luxury, eye-catching cars.

Although my project is mainly around the types of cars Korean American Youth drive compared to other Asian American Youth and Non-Asian American Youth, another article that showed the group nature of Asian American youth as well as how trends are so easily popularized is with the article by Mary Yu Danico and Linda Trinh Vo, "No Lattes Here..." The cyber cafes as well as cyber gaming was made popular to Non-Asian Youth by the Asian American Youth, spending days and nights in these Cyber Cafes. This group conformity to one popular type of past-time shows the influence Asian American Youth and its links to popular entertainment and culture from Asia, have on non-Asian youth. Many times, the Asian-American Youth enjoying things such as import car racing and cybergaming, (in the beginning) were made fun of, as soon as American corporations caught on and
marketed these ways in an "American Fashion" non-Asian American kids were hooked, and the ones that used to make fun of the Asian Kids for doing such things were now souping up their cars and playing Counterstrike too.

Coming back to the soul of my project, popular American entertainment has caught on to Asian Trends as well. The movie series, "Fast and Furious" has had a big impact on the import car scene. Prior to the release of the first Fast and the Furious, events such as Hot Import Nights and driving Civics that didn’t look like civics and roared louder than monster trucks were made fun of and thought of as stupid. However, after American culture tycoons of entertainment and multimedia caught on to the phenomenon that was spreading like wildfire across Asia, the Non-Asian Youth latched on like leeches and started thinking it was their own, the racing, the customizing and the gaming. However, there is a controversy found in this. The hypocrisy that lies in what I just mentioned is where Asian-American Youth and our culture get lost once American Mainstream Entertainment society gets involved to influence and advertise and lure in non-Asian Youth. Asian’s don’t get credit, and when Asian American's were getting made fun of, no one seems to apologize or give credit to the fact that the Asians started the trend way before the non-Asian Youth thought it was "cool." However, that is another project all in itself.

Bibliography


Research Proposal: November 21, 2007

Growing up in an affluent northwest suburb, I couldn’t help but notice the cars my friends along with other peers were driving at such a young
As a second-generation Korean-American young adult, I started to wonder if there was any link between Korean-American youth and cars compared to non-Korean youth/young-adult. After watching movies such as the Fast and Furious, my curiosity for this topic broadened. After reading the article by Professor Soo Ah Kwon, I learned that this interest in automobiles and spending the money on them was a trend in Asian American Youth, but I wanted to know the specificity in Korean-American Youth.

Do Korean-American parents buy their children expensive cars? Why do Korean-American Youth drive such nice cars? Why are they able to ask for such high-priced automobiles? Why do Korean-American parents allow it? What are the similarities and differences between Korean-American Youth cars based on generation (1.5 vs. 2nd)?

The EUI projects of others paved a direction for me to think when I needed to think of a research ideal. The article by Anona Whitley, “Korean American Aesthetics & Style” related to my idea and gave me a starting point that Korean-Americans did care about style. Next, the EUI project that I used in order to start my observations was based on the project titled, “Cultural Mapping of Dorms.” This project showcases dorms such as FAR/PAR and Six Pack with more minorities in Far/Par and more white students in Six Pack.

Throughout my observation and interviewee picks, I focused my attention on the FAR/PAR area. My initial observations took place under the awning at FAR on Friday and Saturday afternoons. To better understand my questions and assumptions, I chose to sit on the bench and just watch cars and its drivers/owners go by.

Based on my observations and interviews I have found that there is correlation between Korean-American youth and cars. I have also found that there is a difference in the cars that 1.5 generation Korean-American youth and 2nd generation Korean-American Youth. My interviews answered questions that Korean-American Youth and their interest in high-priced cars come from their parents also. Usually, when parents drove high-priced luxury cars, their children also were given very nice cars.

Materialism comes full circle when it comes to Korean-Americans however, it is seen that it is a “style” among Korean-American youth as well as a trend. In the article, No Lattes Here": Asian American Youth and the Cyber Café Obsession” I noticed that Asian-American youth look to their peers for the new “hot” thing. They are trendsetters and want to be noticed. The Cyber Café Obsession and internet gaming first got attention because of Asian American Youth it then trickled
down to White American youth. Just like this phenomenon, import cars and interest in spending money to “soupe” up cars first struck interest with Asian American Youth.

This theory of Asian-American youth looking to each other for the next cool thing is supported by Rebecca Yim’s article “Second-Generation Korean American Evangelicals: Ethnic, Multiethnic or White Campus Ministries?” There are many Second-Generation Korean American students in Campus Ministries. Even at the University of Illinois I noticed that the main campus ministry where the Asian-Americans go (CFC: Covenant Fellowship Church, www.cfc.org) is dominated by Second-Generation Korean-Americans. I have experienced this group and felt very welcomed and comfortable because of the other second-generation Korean-American such as me. I also collected more data on cars based on the members of the church and noticed another difference that was parallel to my first observation at FAR between 1.5 Generation/International Students and 2nd Generation Korean-American Students.

Through my research, I noticed many interesting points. The generation differences between Korean-American youth had a significant draw on what car each respectable student drove. International/1.5 generation students always had the upper hand and beat their 2nd generation Korean-American counterpart in cars by at least $10,000.

Although this could be the act of the Korean Won being worth more than the dollar, it just seemed as though there was a clear difference in ‘budgets” among the two generations of students.

This semester’s research and class has given me an opportunity to try to answer some questions as well as create new questions. I have learned much about the car scene in Korean Americans as well as find that there is a link between children and parental views. If the parents are into cars, their children usually reap similar benefits. Korean-American parents are influential in their children’s life with high standards however, Korean-American students choose to try to please their parents and in turn end up with very nice things.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


From IDEALS, the research project by Jane Lee, entitled "Korean American College Process" was the best project that I thought had the most insight into Korean American life as a second generation child. I felt that the research process was simple, yet effective. The interview questions that Jane had given out to her interviewees were right on point and the interviewees seemed to give very good feedback. Going on, the interviews included in her project were well thought-out, analyzed, and prepared. While reading the interviews, I thought about my own college experience and although, FAFSA wasn't an issue, I saw many similarities and differences with my own parents and academic life growing up. Although the actual project, "college application process" is not the focal point or even part of what i would like to do for my project, i do feel that the content of this project hits a spot where I would like to go with my research. The next project that I like to touch on is the project by Anona Whitley, titled, "Korean American Aesthetics and Style." As I was reading her project, I felt like i had entered a twilight zone that brought me back to my younger years. Even now, i feel as though Korean Americans have a great interest in their aesthetics and style. A research topic that i brainstormed was AA's and cars. One main aesthetic Korean Americans focus on other than clothing, are cars. Growing up in an affluent part of the northwest chicago suburbs, I remember friends of mine joking how certain high school parking lots were, for example how at a certain high school (i do not want to mention the name) the student car parking lot had nicer cars than that of the faculty. And to make my evidence even more striking, I remember knowing who drove what, and it stuck out in my head that the Korean American students, whether they were "FOBs" or American-born had the nicest fanciest cars. When I turned 16, some KA friends of mine were getting BMW's and Lexus'(girls), or other racing cars seen on movies like "The Fast and the Furious." The average price of my friends (KA) cars being around $30,000 while my non-korean friends were getting hand-me-downs and used cars no
where near the $30,000 sticker. However, these two projects really
struck an accord with me on how Korean Americans, although may
grow up academically with more pressure, they seem to get spoiled
and indulged with material posessions. The two projects helped me
think and narrow down my research topic ideas as well as give me
some insight on how to go about doing the research process of my
project. "EUI LINKS" - 11.8.07 Throughout my research in the EUI
IDEALS, i came across two specific research projects that completely
were parallel to my project. they dealt with aesthetics, materialism, and
vanity. Although these two projects did not focus in on cars, the
clothing, and the ideals behind Korean Americans were all the same,
which is that, it matters what you wear and how you look. Anona
Whitney's Project, "Korean American Aesthetics and Style" was a fresh
breath of fresh air to what I have felt throughout this entire research. It
was an article i related to as well, because I have felt the same
pressures around me even as a Korean American with parents, whom i
consider, very "assimilated." However, Whitney's interviewees are
saying the same thing in a sense to those i have briefly questioned and
interviewed, materialism is a big part of the Korean American culture,
and the way you look on the outside is judged to its fullest before the
inside. The old saying of "don't judge a book by its cover" is thrown out
and never even considered in our culture. The other article that greatly
related to my research was by Jennifer Norberg, "Class and the
consumption of status symbols on the U of I campus." Although, this
research has a broader area of research, with no one nationality focus,
the comments made by her interviewees show how maybe materialism
and vanity do not run too far from Korean Americans. Although, it is
greatly incorporated into the KA society with its young-adults, there are
a fair amount of non-KA(or even Asian) students who do rack up credit
card bills due to their tastes for luxurious brand names in clothing,
accessories, and lifestyle. The gentleman that was interviewed,
described it so that he liked it, but even when looking around UIUC
campus, through my observation, there are plenty of white guy/girls
who can be grouped into the superficial/materialistic/vain grouping of
korean-american guys/girls, with their ugg boots, seven jeans, and
H&M shirt, with a fake LV bag, although most KA girls would have the
REAL thing. it's a falsified image that the young-adult youth of today
want to portray to idolize what's going on in the upper eschilon of the
world from NY, Milan, LA, and Paris fashion. With reality shows at its
worst, it's PEAK, everyone from the lowest financial bracket to the 1%
of those that can afford luxurious things are exposed to what is hot and
what is not, and what is the "IT" thing with celebrities. Our idolization of
the paparazzi driven world has fueled the fire for mounds of credit card
debt, $600 dollar shoes, $2000 handbags, and a life that is enjoyed
only in spurts because materials sooner or later, become the next old
thing. Links: http://hdl.handle.net/2142/1882 - Jennifer Norberg
Reflect: December 6, 2007 I felt the entire process of this research was amazing. The resource given and the student response was great. My research presents even more questions to ways in which Korean-American students on the University interact and socialize. Moodle was a great way I thought in order to keep track of my research and the week-by-week installments of my research was a helpful for me in order to stay on task. Working under IRB codes was no problem and I felt the precautions were a great way in order to ensure privacy for interviewees.

Recommendations: Throughout this semester project, I couldn't help but notice how much of an international gap Korean students put between each other. The international Korean students and the Second+ Generation of Korean-American students rarely group themselves together, there is always a disconnect. One recommendation I would like to give to the University is to try to make a conference or program through the school, in which there is a way for international Korean students and the Korean-American students to get to know each other on a different level than in groups such as KSA and KASA. Another recommendation I would like to give is to try to put Korean-American (2nd+ generation) and International Korean (FOB) students together in rooming as well as spreading out these couples. I noticed that the majority of Korean Students live in the FAR/PAR area, however, I feel that if these students were put together as roommates but in different parts of the dorms, such as 6pack or ISR, there would be a different aura and difference in the way college is experienced.