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Jaeyoun Bang  
Understanding the Emotional  
Experiences of First Generation  
Korean-American Fathers:  
Perspectives from Meta-Emotion  
Philosophy

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the emotional experience of 12 first generation Korean immigrant fathers who live in the United States. This study is a secondary analysis of data from a doctoral dissertation project titled, “Culture Weaves Family: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Korean-American and European American Parental Meta-Emotion Philosophy and its Relationship to Parent-Child Interaction” by Eun Young Nahm.

This study explored the emotional experiences of Korean-American fathers and their perceptions of their children’s and spouses’ experiences in the areas of: sadness, anger, pride, and affection based on meta-emotion philosophy designed by Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1996). The findings of this qualitative research study revealed that many of the Korean-American fathers’ emotional experiences were closely related to their interpretation of Korean traditional culture. Analyses showed a close relationship between the role of the Korean traditional males’ values and their emotional experiences. The perceptions of the emotional experiences of their children and wives revealed common themes about awareness, desire to comfort, need to protect and instruct, and, insight into ways that cultural conflicts and societal changes affect them.

UNDERSTANDING THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES OF FIRST GENERATION  
KOREAN-AMERICAN FATHERS:  
PERSPECTIVES FROM META-EMOTION PHILOSOPHY

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Jaeyoun Bang

Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2009

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore four emotions – sadness, anger, affection, and pride- experienced by first generation Korean-American immigrant fathers, and their observations of how their wives and children experience the same emotions. First generation immigrants are those who were born in their native country and migrated to another country as adults (Choi, 2007). Being first generation immigrants, the Korean-American fathers who participated in this study would more likely be accustomed to traditional Korean values, which are highly influenced by Confucianism.

Park and Cho (1995) describe that the core value of Confucianism is a family. Therefore, once a man gets married, his major role changes to be a father, husband, and head of household with the statement of authority, where other members are expected to be obedient to him (Kim, Kim, & Kelly, 2006; Park & Cho, 1995). Park and Cho (1995) also describe how the value of Confucianism is reflected in universal marriage and childrearing in many Asian countries influenced by Confucianism. The family unit works together as one to bring harmony within, before meeting one's own needs; that is the needs of the family unit are more important than those of any single family member. On the other hand, the major social value of the United States is individualism which is rooted in the Eurocentric system (Kim, Kim, & Kelly, 2006; Pyke, 2000). Therefore, many Korean-American fathers are exposed to this dilemma in defining his gender role: often either they will be marginalized or stereotyped (Liu, 2002). Liu (2002) reported how Asian Americans are often "radicalized" as a homogenous group along with racial and ethnic self-definition. She also stated that Asian American fathers are faced with

more challenges because the multiple aspects that form their identity may not match those of Western society. Therefore, they may even be interpreted or perceived as being feminine (Liu, 2002).

In regards to Asian American families, much research has been conducted on the relationship between parents' emotional expression as perceived by adolescents or college students and the influence on their psychological well-being (Kim & Cain, 2008; Ang, 2006; Kurdeck & Fine, 1994). In those studies, one of the common themes was that many of the male adolescents or college students perceived their parents, especially fathers, as more controlling and less warm. The discrepancy in cultural values between fathers and their children can result in an intergenerational conflict because parents are likely to base their parenting style on traditional cultural values, while their children may be more accustomed to Western culture (Tsai & Nagata, 2008; Ying & Han, 2007; Yeh, et.al, 2005; Pyke, 2000).

Often, Asian American families are described in cross-cultural studies where the comparison is made between Asian American families and European American families (Johnson, 2007; Kim & Rohner, 2002; Singer & Weinstein, 2000; Lin & Fu, 1990; Chiu, 1987). Many of the studies were interpreted by theories based on the European American culture and focused on between group differences (not within group differences) mainly based on race, ethnicity, and culture. However, those studies are not generalizable nor do they explain each group in detail. This study purposely focused on a small group of participants to learn, in depth, about the experience of Korean-American fathers.

This is a qualitative study, exploratory in design using flexible methods for research with a focus on narrative data collection. The twelve interviews used in this

thesis are part of a larger data set (total of 31 interviews) collected by Dr. Eun Young Nahm. Her dissertation project, Culture Weaves Family: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Korean-American and European American Parental Meta-Emotion Philosophy and its Relationship to Parent-Child Interaction at University of Washington, Department of Psychology (2006) conducted between 2004 and 2005, was the first study to apply the meta-emotion philosophy in the cross-cultural study of European American families and Korean-American families (Nahm, 2006). Meta-emotion interview questions designed by Katz & Gottman (1996) ask questions pertaining to one's emotional experiences, perceptions on his child's emotional experiences and his wife's emotional experiences.

The Korean-American fathers in the study were first generation immigrants who were married and had a child either 8 or 9 years old. The participants were interviewed individually in person and the interview lasted on average of sixty to ninety minutes. Over 95% of the time, the interview was done in Korean and English was used for clarification purposes only.

The primary audience for this study will be social workers or clinicians in the field who work with Korean-American families. Due to the small sample size, the results of this study can not be generalized to all Korean-American families; however, this could be used as a tool to raise understanding and awareness of the emotional experience of Korean-American fathers. The interview responses of the participants may help in increasing cultural sensitivity for those clinicians and future clinicians who work with Korean-American families.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will examine the perception of meta-emotion philosophy, upon which the meta-emotion interview questions were developed, cultural aspects of Korean traditional culture, and reports on Asian American families' emotional experiences reported in the past literature. The literature review will reflect the research question: What are the main factors or influences that determine the emotional experience of Korean-American males as a man, a father and a husband?

#### *Meta-Emotion Philosophy*

How do we define emotion? Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1996) introduced the concept of "meta-emotion" which means "emotion about emotion", an analogous to metacognitions. Meta-emotion is based on Ginott's work, in which he emphasized the importance of parents to intervene in their children's negative emotions as they are experiencing them. Gottman et al. developed the meta-emotion interview to allow researchers and clinicians to learn about parents' emotional experiences and how they communicate emotions to their children (Schwartz, Thigpen & Montgomery, 2006).

Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1997) found that the approach parents took toward their own emotions had broad implications for the emotional well-being of both parents and their children. Gottman et al. (1996) identified four styles of meta-emotion philosophy as follows: emotion coaching, the dismissing style, disapproving, and laissez-faire attitude. First, in the emotion coaching style parents validate the emotional experiences and use the opportunity to show affection or teach about emotions. For example, parents may give a hug to their child who looks sad and help their child to

acknowledge the emotion he or she is experiencing. The parent may go through the process which their child is experiencing like a coach. Second, in the dismissing style, parents ignore or do not acknowledge much of the emotion their child is experiencing. For example, the parents may try to distract their child from experiencing negative emotions like anger. Third, parents with a disapproving style may punish or criticize the emotional experiences of their child. For instance, parents would punish their child for expressing sadness or anger. Lastly, the laissez-faire attitude is when the parents do not set any appropriate boundary or guidance, rather only provide permissive acceptance.

The emotion coaching style is the ideal parenting style which helps the family to promote emotional well being and allows children to build social competence (Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996; Gottman et al., 1996). European American parents are often described as authoritative in the literature. It is a form of parenting style that is characterized by high levels of warmth and low levels of control and is the main focus of emotion coaching (Schwartz, Thigpen, & Montgomery, 2006; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2005; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996). On the other hand, Asian American parents are often described as authoritarian. It is a form of parenting style that is characterized by high levels of control and low levels of warmth (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2005; Singer & Weinstein, 2000; Kurdek & Fine, 1994).

### *Korean Traditional Cultural Values and Masculinity*

In Korean traditional culture, men are expected to restrict their emotional expression, especially the feeling of sadness. The Korean proverb below captures a general theme of masculinity and the expectation of societal male emotional

experiences.

“A man should cry only three times in his life, when he was born, when his parents passed away and when his nation meets the destruction.” (Korean Proverb)

Based on Korean traditional culture, the male emotional experience is very tightly related to the gender role. Literature also supports the idea that there is a close relationship between one's emotional experience and the effect of cultural influence on those experiences (Johnson, 2007; Kim, Kim, & Kelly; 2006; Kim, 2005; Lin & Fu, 1990). Cross-cultural studies around similarities and differences of emotional recognition and expression are based on the belief that emotional experiences are closely related to one's culture (Beaupre & Hess, 2009; Pyke, 2000; Tafarodi, et.al, 2004; Chiu, 1987).

Confucianism is deeply rooted in the traditional Korean culture and thus it has influenced the formation of family and social interactions among the family members. In the belief system of Confucianism, family is treated as the smallest unit of the society, and the hierarchical relationships are emphasized, for example, husband-wife and parent-child, (Choi, 2007). Men are expected to be heads of the households with most authority and responsibility to provide financial means and physical protection to their families. In addition, with the strong influence of Confucianism, there is a strong value placed on the importance of group needs over individual (Park & Cho, 1995). There have been rapid changes in the Korean society; however, changes to the patriarchal family system have not kept the pace with changes in the rest of the society. This is especially true for older generations. Those beliefs add another layer of expectation for men to be tough and do not give much space for them to express or experience emotions.

### *Parenting and Parent-Child Interaction of Asian Americans*

In examining the Asian American population, many researchers have focused on explaining the differences between Eastern and Western cultures. One common theme in research studies is the societal difference between Asian collectivism and Western individualism (Gunsalus & Kelly, 2001; Gellis, Huh, Lee, & Kim, 2003; Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008). Interestingly, Lin and Fu (1990) found in their study that Chinese parents in Taiwan are more likely to encourage their children's independence compared to Chinese American immigrant parents, and European American parents.

There are studies that emphasize the importance of increasing cultural understanding and competence of different ethnic groups, which will help clinicians to understand the pattern of socialization and socially desired behaviors including parenting styles (Kim, Kim, & Kelly, 2006; Pyke, 2000; Chao, 1994). Additionally, various studies have identified cultural influences on parenting styles and socialization patterns among and within different ethnic groups such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean (Ying & Han, 2007; Ang, 2006; Kim, 2005; Chao, 1994; Chiu, 1987).

Many of the research studies were based on the hypothesis that there is correlation between Asian parenting styles and psychological distress such as depression in adolescents (Kim & Cain, 2008; Ying & Han, 2007; Yeh, et. al, 2005; Yeh & Inose, 2002). Those cross cultural studies between Asian families and European American families (often European American families) did not show a correlation between warmth of parents and psychological distress in youths. Rather, prominent challenges that those families experienced were intergenerational conflicts between parents and youths when families encounter the stress of immigration or being families of minority population

(Kim & Cain, 2008; Noh, Kaspar, & Wickrama, 2007; Ying & Han, 2007; Yeh, et. al, 2005; Yeh & Inose, 2002).

*Emotional Experiences of Asian American Families*

Past research has reported the influence of the emotional expressions and socializations within families to the children's emotional development (Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Fabes, Lenoard, Kupanoff, & Martin, 2001; Kurdek & Fine, 1994). Tsai-Chae and Nagata (2008) indicated that family conflicts across intergeneration occur when there is discrepancy in the rate of acculturation among family members. Parents may expect their family to live based on their traditional cultural values, where their child may prefer to follow the new cultural values (Tsai & Nagata, 2008; Ying & Han, 2007).

In many of the cross-cultural studies, Rohner's parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory) was used explaining the psychological adjustment of an individual based on their parents' parenting style (Rohner, Khalque, & Cournoyer, 2005). The main concept of the PARTheory is all children need some type of positive response like acceptance from their parents, which is a universal need regardless of one's ethnicity, race, gender, and more. Therefore, for those who perceived themselves to be rejected by their parents are more likely to encounter problems in psychological adjustment throughout their life span. Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer (2005) reported that nearly 2000 cross-cultural studies done in United States supported the relation between parents' acceptance-rejection and the psychological adjustment of their children.

On the other hand, there are studies that emphasize the importance of incorporating different cultural values of parenting in order to understand their children's

psychological well being more accurately. According to Kim (2005), greater parental behavioral control is understood by the adolescents in Korea as greater acceptance, rather than a rejection from their parents. In her research she compared the cultural differences between two different groups of adolescents; those who were born in Korea and those who were born in America (Kim, 2005). Based on the self-reports of Korean-American adolescents and their parents, they all experienced the warmth and love in their relationship with moderate firmness. Fathers reported that the more behavioral controlling on their children was a way to provide more affection to their children (Kim, 2005).

Those two studies with contrary findings cannot be led to make any final conclusions. There are inherent risks in generalizing results of studies with a small group of participants; one potential problem occurs when specific characteristics that pertain to a few individuals become stereotypes about all the group members. Stereotyping can be particularly harmful to ethnic minority people. At the same time, those results highlight the need to study more about ethnic groups that are understudied or underserved in clinical practice like Korean-American fathers. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of these studies, mainly in thesis and dissertation projects, that specifically target underserved or understudied populations. These studies will hopefully offer more insights into these populations.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the emotional experience of 12, first generation Korean immigrant fathers in the United States. This study is a secondary data analysis from a doctoral dissertation project titled “Culture Weaves Family: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Korean-American and European American Parental Meta-Emotion Philosophy and its Relationship to Parent-Child Interaction” by Eun Young Nahm. This was the first cross-cultural study using the meta-emotion interview system.

Between 2004 and 2005, the potential participants were recruited in the greater Seattle area who met the criteria as listed: a heterosexual married couple with a child whose age is between 8 or 9, ethnic identification as either European American or Korean-American who have resided for over three years in United States. For the purpose of this thesis, the primary researcher, Dr. Nahm, selected 12 interviews from the Korean fathers from her data of 31 interviews of Korean-American fathers based on the years of living in America, which was between 3 years to 30 years.

The unpublished manuscript of meta-emotion interviews was translated by a bilingual researcher and her research assistants from English to Korean for those families who prefer to speak in Korean and tested the accuracy in focus groups of bilingual people. The interview was done at the residence of the family to provide comfort and a familiar environment for the interviewee and his family. The interview was done in an isolated place from their spouse and children to provide privacy. In this project, all 12 Korean fathers chose to do interviews mainly in Korean.

For this study, the focus is on the father's present emotional experience, his perception of his child and spouse's emotional experience of all four emotions: sadness, anger, affection, and pride. The interview was divided into four parts: the father's family of origin, the father's self-report of their experiences, the father's perception of his child's emotional experiences, and the father's perception of his spouse's emotional experiences. For each emotion, fathers were asked a list of questions including: What is it like for you to be sad? How do you feel inside when you are sad?

The first part of the interview, the section of family origin, was asking briefly about the father's emotional experience as a child and while he was growing up. All four emotions were asked prior to asking questions about the present. Please refer to Appendix A for the list of questions that were asked at the interview.

The second part of the meta-emotion interview was to ask the Korean fathers for their emotional experiences of sadness in the present. The questions included, What is it like for you to be sad? Can you give me a recent example of a time when you felt sad? Then, the fathers were asked about their perceptions of his child's emotional experiences. The questions included, What is it like when \_\_\_ (child's name) is sad? Can you tell when (s)he is sad? (Please see Appendix B for the list of questions asked in regard to present.) Then, the father was asked his perception of his wife's emotional experiences. The questions included, "What is like for your spouse when she feels sad? Can you tell when she is feeling sad?" (Please see Appendix C for the list of questionnaires.) For all four emotions, the same sets of questions were repeated except the changes of emotions. (For sample of the questionnaire in Korean, please refer to Appendix D.)



In analyzing the data, this researcher used the design for qualitative studies looking for similarities, differences and common themes among the 12 Korean fathers and their responses to the meta-emotion interview questions.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

The findings of this study are based on the responses of the Korean-American fathers to the Meta-Emotion interview questions. This study is the second data analysis of Dr. Nam's dissertation project entitled Culture Weaves Family: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Korean-American and European American Parental Meta-Emotion Philosophy and its Relationship to Parent-Child Interaction at the University of Washington, Department of Psychology (2006). This chapter is divided into the five sections: demographics, family of origin, Korean-American fathers' emotional experiences, their perception of their child's emotional experiences, and their perception of their wife's emotional experiences. Ninety eight percent of the interviews were conducted in Korean, and English was used only for clarification. In addition, for clarification, general and non-directive examples were given, which were uniformly planned for all the interviewers in the pilot study to provide consistency. In analyzing the data, this researcher used the design of qualitative study looking for similarities, differences, and common themes among the 12 Korean-American fathers and their responses to the meta-emotion interview questions.

#### Demographics

All 12 Korean-American fathers were identified as first generation immigrants from Korea, meaning that they were born in Korea and migrated to the United States as adults. The average age of the Korean-American fathers was in the mid 40s, and they all reported being married over 10 years. They also reported living in United States between 3 to 30 years. All of the Korean-American fathers had at least one child whose age was

either 8 or 9 years old. Some fathers had up to four children. All the Korean-American fathers held a bachelor degree and some of them had achieved an even higher degree. All of the Korean-American fathers identified as middle class. There was an unplanned commonality among the participants by identifying as Christian, though their level of involvement with their church was varied.

#### *Family of Origin of Korean-American Fathers*

This section describes the overall picture of Korean-American fathers' childhood experiences. In terms of their childhood emotional experiences, Korean-American fathers felt that it was closely related to how their parents handled or dealt with their children's emotional experiences. Mr. Baek and Mr. Yim illustrated this concept saying,

Mr. Baek: When our siblings got into an argument or a fight, my dad would step in and do his one-way intervention on us. He would give us a lecture about what to do or what not to do. He was a teacher for his career and he often treated us as if we were his students. There was no option or an opportunity to even say what happened.

Mr. Yim: As you may know, back in the 60s and 70s, there was no conversation about feelings like sadness within the family. My father had the most power in the family and he was the leader of the family, where all the family members were expected to respect and obey what he said.

In addition to the parenting style, which seemed to limit the emotional expression as a child, many participants (n=10) shared how it was perceived as a norm in Korean society for a man to limit in expressing their emotions outwardly as Mr. Han describes: "Though men admit that they are sad, men tend to keep their sadness to themselves and deal with it alone or quietly, unlike women." Similarly, Mr. Choi described the restriction of expressing emotions outwardly and he described his experience of affection,

My family did not express affection outwardly just like any other Korean families. We knew that we loved each other, but we don't show or talk about it.

In the following sections, four emotions that are experienced by Korean-American fathers as a child or while he was growing up will be discussed.

*Korean-American Fathers' Experience of Sadness in Childhood*

In terms of sadness in childhood, one of the common themes was related to death.

Mr. Doh described one of the occasions when he experienced feeling sad as a child:

While I was growing up, I don't recall experiencing much sadness. But when my grandparents passed away, it was an occasion to be sad with no question. I may not have much understanding or grasp about death, but I cried because I felt sad. I also remember thinking that 'When someone passes away, the loves ones cry, longing, and grieving for the lost.' All my family and extended family members were sad, so I didn't feel the need to seek someone else to talk or others for my feelings to be acknowledged.

Five Korean-American fathers described their sadness related to death in the family similarly to Mr. Doh. On the other hand, the rest of the participants (n=7) did not perceive their sadness as a major part of their life experience. For instance, for those who discussed sadness as being related to family conflict, it was not significant enough an event for them to warrant further discussion.

In overcoming the sadness, the first and primary response was to keep the sadness to one's self and not talk about it. About 50% of the participants reported the more the subject was closer to the family matter, the more they preferred to cope with their emotions on their own. Family members recognize each other's emotional experiences, yet they tend to not openly discuss their emotional experiences. For the parents of the Korean-American fathers, they would take a role in trying to comfort their child by meeting their needs or doing things to cheer them up. Mr. Noh shared:

I had a cat and she didn't come back home for days. But then, I found the dead body of my cat on the street after a few days. I was really sad. I can't recall whether we (his family) talked about my emotions or not. But I remember me

crying and my parents made a small tomb for the cat. My parents also got me a new cat. I imagine my family was trying to comfort me, though I can't quite remember what had happened.

On the other hand, those who had someone to openly talk about their emotional experiences reported how helpful it was when trying to cope with their emotional experiences. Two of the participants shared that friends were great support in helping them to cope with their sadness, though they would not necessarily talk about why they were feeling sad in detail. Mr. Kwon was the only one who reported sharing his sadness with his family, aunt and mostly with his uncle, who was like his life mentor.

Mr. Kwon illustrated his experience as,

I left my family in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade to study in Seoul (capital of South Korea). It was difficult to adjust to the changes, including being the youngest one where I was the oldest child in my family. I often expressed my feelings and sought consultation from my aunt and uncle. Having them to talk to about my feelings was really helpful and I really appreciated it. My uncle is still a mentor of my life.

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Experience of Anger in Childhood*

In terms of anger, Korean-American fathers reported having more experiences of anger than sadness, though most of them did not share their experiences in detail.

Instead, they shared the general dynamics of their family or the common cause that made them angry.

Over the half of Korean-American fathers (n=7) reported that they experienced and expressed their anger outwardly. In most cases, they would express their anger within the family either by starting an argument or a physical fight with their male siblings. At times, the participants reported yelling or screaming in an effort to release the pressure and bottled up emotions in them. One of the common reasons for them to

experience anger was when they felt as if their parents favored their sibling over them.

This is illustrated by Mr. Ahn:

I was the youngest one in the family and my oldest brother received all the favor from my parents. I often started an argument with my older brother just to show that I am angry about being treated unfairly. Sometimes, I talked about my frustration with my friends and they share how they also experience things similar to me. I felt socially accepted from my peers and often it helped me to feel calmer and less angry. Without the peer support, I may have gotten angrier.

Other Korean-American fathers shared similar experiences on how they perceived their parents as favoring themselves or another sibling. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, it was common to have more than one child in the family, and those conflicts reflected how one's birth order played a significant role.

Korean-American fathers who had male siblings reported more frequent arguments or fights with their male siblings. Those expressions of anger were more acceptable compared to sadness, though there were some limitations within. With the strong influence of Confucianism, Korean-American fathers were forbidden to be rebellious toward parents, for example, talking back to adults, especially to their fathers. Mr. Yim describes this: "It is unimaginable or illogical to show any sign of anger in the presence of my father."

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Experience of Affection in Childhood*

In terms of affection, almost all the Korean-American fathers (n=10) shared that they have no question about experiencing affection within their family. Mr. Han responded as:

Just like many other Korean families in general, we did not talk or express our affection openly to each other. But, we all knew that we loved each other. We as a family would try to show our love by taking an action of sharing something valuable. My parents would make sure to feed their children with good food and

sacrifice for their needs. As far as affection you could feel their loving heart and how much we cared about each other.

Most of Korean-American fathers described similar experiences to Mr. Han's in terms of affection. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the traditional Korean family generally showed their affection by being happy for each other and tried to do extra work on behalf the family. Parents encouraged their children to pursue higher education as it was considered an important element in determining one's success even if it required that parents sacrifice for their children.

In reflecting their role as a father, 75% of Korean-American fathers shared memories of their fathers and their affection. Mr. Yim described his experience as:

In old days, it was typical for my parents to not show affection outwardly to one another. And my father's way of expressing affection would be one way direction and sometimes in the ways that his children may not like. On Sundays, he would ask all of us (his children) to wear what he wanted us to wear including my mother. Then, he would take us to a bakery to have a snack, go watch a movie, have dinner and come home. It was fun only up to when we were young. We (the children) didn't like the ritual once we got older, but we had no choice but to obey what my father told us to do.

Many other Korean-American fathers had similar responses to Mr. Yim's. At the same time, some Korean-American fathers reflected the differences between their own experiences of affection as a child to their children's experiences. They mentioned how ways to express their affection have changed for their children's generations compared to their own. In addition, Korean-American fathers also described the discrepancy between the traditional Korean styles versus Western styles, especially in expression of affection, which they are still in the process of learning about.

### *Korean-American Fathers' Experience of Pride in Childhood*

All of the Korean-American fathers expressed in synchrony how their experience of pride was directly related to getting validation and gaining trust from their parents. This critical parental support was also an influencing factor in the Korean-American fathers' development of self-esteem and self-confidence. One of the common themes was based on their parents giving positive and encouraging messages to their sons to provide support. Their parents had high expectations for their sons to be successful. Therefore, achieving higher or proper education was very important for both the parents and their sons (the Korean-American fathers in this study). Their parents were willing to sacrifice, if needed, to support their sons both financially and emotionally.

The experience of pride was reflected within a family rather than for an individual's success. For pride, many of the participants (n=9) described the significant role their father played in helping them to be proud of themselves. Mr. Ahn shared:

My father often will say things like this to me, "Don't worry about failures or making mistakes. You go out and try to do anything that you would like. We as a family have faith in you, and we are here for you when you need any support and comfort."

In addition, Mr. Kwon and a couple of other participants felt proud of themselves when their parents consulted important family matters with them. The Korean-American fathers interpreted the offer from their parents as a sign that they were now old enough to play this important role in the family.

In terms of expressing or sharing pride, similar to sadness and anger, participants (n=12) reported that they kept positive feelings to themselves and didn't share with others except within the family or with close friends. One of the reasons was that outward



expressions of pride are viewed negatively, as bragging, in Korean society. More than half of the participants put criticism on people, who exaggerated or overstated their small achievement as if they have done something major. As an example, Mr. Kim described his experience of pride in the following way:

I was proud to think that I am able to achieve things on my own, regardless of the circumstances that I was in. However, the experience is for my good and I made sure that I don't behave prideful when there is no evidence or proven work to support my feelings.

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Emotional Experience in Present*

In the family of origin part of the interview, the purpose was to get a brief history of each participant's emotional experience as a child. In addition, this was designed to get some general idea of the intergenerational influences on Korean-American fathers' emotional experiences and their parenting style. In the following section, the fathers' present emotional experience is discussed.

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Emotional Experience of Sadness*

What is sadness like for you? All the Korean-American fathers either paused momentarily or asked for clarification. For clarification, interviewers described sadness as feeling down or blue as suggested in the Meta-Emotion interview. One-third of the participants responded like Mr. Doh or Mr. Kim:

Mr. Doh: hmm... how could I describe feeling like sad in words. Doesn't emotions like sadness come and felt naturally?

Mr. Kim: When I am sad, I am sad.

Another third of the Korean-American fathers responded in relation to how men respond to sadness in general. Mr. Choi and Mr. Ryu responded saying,

Mr. Choi: Well, I try not to feel so sad or feel down, just like any other men would. Though compared to the past, I no longer avoid or try so hard to avoid feeling my emotions like sadness.

Mr. Ryu: Sad. But I usually don't express my feelings though. I try to control my own emotions.

Lastly, the third group of three Korean-American fathers shared significant changes that occurred in their experience of sadness, mainly in terms of their expression of sadness.

Mr. Ahn and Mr. Kim described changes in their experience of sadness:

Mr. Ahn: I am 44 years old this year, and I've changed as I got older. In the past, I wouldn't cry even when I was feeling sad, but now I do. I don't try to repress or avoid feeling my emotions anymore, so I just express my emotions.

Mr. Yim: I cry when I feel sad. Since I met Jesus, I cry so well and so often. When I feel sad, tears just run down on my face. I don't hide my emotions anymore.

The differences in the emotional experiences of Korean-American fathers were reflected in their responses. It was clear how the 12 Korean-American fathers had their own unique ways of experiencing sadness, though there were some similarities. The remaining questions focused on how Korean-American fathers in this study experience sadness. Regardless of how each of the Korean-American fathers described their emotional experiences, all of them were sure that their family members, especially their wives, could recognize when they are feeling sad. Six of the Korean-American fathers reported that their emotional expression is so obvious, so even strangers would notice that they are feeling sad.

Asking for a recent example of when the Korean-American fathers experienced sadness, many of them had a difficult time name an occasion because they often felt the mixed emotions of sadness and anger. Five of the Korean-American fathers could not

come up with any example because they described nothing serious or significant had happened in their families, for example, illness or death in the family. Similar to what they had shared about their experience of sadness as a child, many of the Korean-American fathers related their sadness to a particular phenomenon or things that they do not have any control over.

In terms of their coping skills, many Korean-American fathers (n=8) reported doing physical activities like playing a sport or redirecting their focus from their emotions to their work. Four of the Korean-American fathers reported dealing with their sadness more directly with reliance on spirituality, for example, worshiping or praying to God. Meanwhile, there was an underlying assumption or belief that time would eventually solve the problem. Therefore, many of the Korean-American fathers allowed some time alone for themselves in addition to use their coping skills.

In addition to their coping skills, all of the Korean-American fathers expressed high praise and appreciation to their wives because they could share their sadness with their wives. The Korean-American fathers referred to this sharing with their wives with the Korean traditional saying: ‘Happiness doubles when shared, whereas, sadness becomes half when shared.’ Here are some examples:

Mr. Baek: When my wife recognizes my sadness, she will try to comfort me. Then, I feel very secure and peaceful.

Mr. Han: I feel comforted just knowing that there is someone who I can share and talk about my inner feelings with. I am also thankful to have my wife as the very person to talk to. Having more communication with my wife doesn’t only help me to feel better, but also it helps for our marital relationship to be stronger.

Mr. Ryu: Though I don’t express my emotions outwardly, my wife notices and she tries to comfort me when I am sad. It’s healing just to have my family with me. I think family is very important.

In the closing part of this section, Korean-American fathers' general idea of sadness was asked. None of the Korean-American fathers had negative opinions or attitudes toward sadness. They shared that they accept sadness as a natural and valuable part of their emotional experience. Their thoughts on sadness were illustrated by Mr.

Kim, Mr. Lee, and Mr. Park:

Mr. Kim: I don't think sadness as something bad. Feeling sad and feeling happy are both feelings that needed to be experienced, so I don't think sadness is bad. I accept it as it comes.

Mr. Lee: I think sadness is a good thing. Why? Because I learned things through sadness and there are also things that I realized through my experience of sadness. Feeling sad in general helps me to realize that I am normal. I would be more concerned if I couldn't feel any emotions. It hurts to experience sadness, but there is beauty in experiencing and overcoming sadness. If not, why would there always be some component of sadness plays out in many movies that people enjoy watching.

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Emotional Experience of Anger*

Compared to sadness, Korean-American fathers in this study responded with less hesitancy in sharing their experience of anger. Seven of the Korean-American fathers in this study responded that they express their anger more outwardly than sadness, for example, raising their voice. Also, their anger is shown physically when their faces turn red. On the other hand, five Korean-American fathers reported that they repress their anger so much that family members cannot tell when they are angry. In addition, many of the Korean-American fathers expressed their anger as a physical sensation, which was commonly described as feeling bottled up or a sudden increase in blood pressure.

There were differences in terms of how the Korean-American fathers described their experiences of anger. All of them emphasized the importance of managing their anger and regaining control, preferably within a short period of time. Here are some

examples of how the Korean-American fathers described their experience of anger:

Mr. Baek: There is no smile or any other emotion shown on my face, and I over react to even small things. Usually my family recognizes when I get angry. I feel physically tired and want to escape from my anger. I usually go into my room and do my work to isolate myself while trying to control my anger.

Mr. Han: My face turns red and I feel like something is blowing up inside of me, so I just yell to release the tension inside of me. Recently, I learned anger is a word without “d” from the word dangerous, so I think anger as something dangerous. Besides, I learned my lessons that being angry doesn’t do any good or solve any problems. So, I try to manage my anger as much as possible.

Mr. Lee: My first reaction when I get angry is I stop talking. I want to escape from my anger. I feel steamed up when I get really angry. I often ending up doing things that I regret doing later on. So, I try to overcome my anger as soon as possible and if I cannot control my anger, then I go to bed. Sometimes, I would even complain to God about things that made me feel angry.

Mr. Park: When I get angry, my action goes first before my thoughts. I yell things like, “Why did you do that when I told you not to do?” Soon after, I try to relax and do something like mind control, though it’s not always easy for me. I also try not to keep my anger inside of me because I get angrier if I do.

In terms of anger, Korean-American fathers reported that they share their feelings with their wives just as they do when they feel sad. However, there are different types of interaction between the married couple depending on what they are angry about. In a situation where the cause of anger was closely related to the married couple, they are more likely to get into an argument. Then, they will go through the process of apologizing and trying to understand each other’s intentions by talking through. However, if the cause is outside the marital relationship, including issues concerning their children, the couple will more likely to provide support for each other as a team.

Lastly, when the Korean-American fathers in this study were asked about their thoughts about anger in general, the majority of them reported that they dislike experiencing anger. About 83% of participants defined anger as something dangerous or

unnecessary. The participants emphasized the importance of managing or controlling anger more than freely expressing anger. Here are a few examples:

Mr. Doh: Though anger can be expressed in many different ways and in different context, I think that we need to think twice before we express our anger. I think that anger has some negative influences to our physical well-being. I don't think anger is very important to be experienced in our lives.

Mr. Lee: I really dislike anger. I just don't want to be with anger and don't even want to be next to someone who is angry. Anger prevents me from thinking clearly because I will put all my energy in trying to control my anger.

Mr. Yim: I think people get angry for something small or unimportant. It's not something natural for people to feel angry at all times, but people get angry so easily. I don't think that it's desirable to be easily angry or get frustrated. Anger is something that we can control only if we try. I also try to remind myself and be cautious in not overly or frequently expressing my anger.

On the other hand, 27% of the Korean-American fathers described anger as a part of their life and that experiencing emotions is natural phenomenon. Their focus was not so much on controlling or being cautious in experiencing anger:

Mr. Ahn: When my self-esteem or pride gets provoked by someone else, then I get angry. But then, there is both good and bad sides of anger in general. I don't think that it's good to be angry so often. On the other hand, if someone doesn't get angry even in situations of injustice that could be problematic, too. I am trying to find a way for myself to express my anger, at the same time; it is not harmful or provoking others to be angry. As one of the experiment, I began to use an e-mail to communicate how I feel with my wife, which helps me to express my anger in controlled way.

Mr. Kwon: It's important to feel angry. If there is no anger in someone, the person is like a dead person. I think anger is as important as experiencing sadness.

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Emotional Experience of Affection*

Based on observations, the Korean-American fathers' voice changed compared to when they were describing their emotional experience of sadness and anger. The participants were also more actively engaged and smiled more frequently while talking

about affection. In terms of experiencing affection, the responses of Korean-American fathers in this study, were divided into two groups. First, half of the group (n=6) responded that they openly express their affection both physically and verbally within their family.

Mr. Han: Well, I hug or hold hands with my wife or my children. I feel good and the atmosphere at home is very positive. I also feel really happy, thankful, want to do better for my family, and think about how beautiful my wife is.

Mr. Park: I show my affection to my wife and especially to my children. I always tell my children that I love them. To my wife, I will show my affection by hugging or kissing her. Everyday I try to spend as much time that I have with my children. Everyday, I hug them and share my love with them. I try to show more of my affection because I didn't experience much affection from my father growing up.

The other half of the group described having a difficult time expressing affection outwardly. They focused on their internal experience when they feel affection because they are less likely to verbally or physically express their affection to their family.

Mr. Kwon: I feel good when I feel affectionate, but I feel shy and little awkward in expressing my affection. I don't know how to show my affection well, but my family knows that I love them. It just feels so good to love and to be loved by my family.

Mr. Yim: It's my homework to express my love and affection to my family. I learned the importance of expressing affection openly when I attended the School for Fathers at my church. But, I still haven't had a chance to say that I love my family nor physically show my affection, though I am trying. This is one of the evidence that I am trying. On my wife's birthday, I took my family to an American restaurant, when I often insisted on eating at home or going to eat at a Korean restaurant. My kids were surprised in a good way, so was my wife. This is just the beginning and I will continually try to show my love to them.

Despite some differences in their style of expressing emotions, all fathers like the experience of affection. Neither there was concern about showing nor experiencing too much affection; instead, they wished that they could show more affection to their family.

In addition to Korean-American fathers' endless praise about the experience of affection, here are a few of examples of how Korean-American fathers described their thoughts on affection.

Mr. Baek: First of all, it is very important for my children to be exposed and have opportunities to experience a wide range of emotions, especially affection. Once the children understand that their family is emotionally stable and can provide the containment, then the children will be able to grow emotionally healthy.

Mr. Kwon: I think affection is a positive emotion. There is a life in the emotion and I want my children to always have it with them. I also wish that everyone could experience and feel the affection in their lives.

Mr. Yim: I realized that I have been only receiving and didn't really know how to give love. My wife complained about that. I love her so much, but I am just new to expressing and sharing my love with her. I also want to express my love for my children, but they are living in a very different generation from my own. So I have homework to learn and to practice expressing my love.

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Emotional Experience of Pride*

In terms of pride, all twelve Korean-American fathers described their experience of pride as something they feel as the internal self-satisfaction rather than an outward expression. Many of the Korean-American fathers shared their experience of pride within the context of achieving their goal, for example, getting a higher degree in academics or being successful at their jobs. In addition, a few Korean-American fathers experienced pride based on their family's compliments of them being a good father and a good husband. One of the common themes that emerged is the importance of not going overboard in the expression of one's pride as it will appear boastful.

Mr. Lee: When I experience pride, I feel really good. I feel like that I can fly. But it's very important to know the difference between being conceited and being proud of what you have achieved. Having self-confident and be proud of oneself is important, but being conceited isn't. The act of being prideful could ruin relationships with others.



Mr. Noh: I would be proud of myself doing what I enjoy doing. However, there is always more to learn and higher goals to achieve. Therefore, I try not to be conceited, which is very different from feeling confident, but to feel proud of who I am.

In addition, a few Korean-American fathers shared their struggle in finding a balance between Korean and Western cultural values. For instance, the experience of pride is considered to be more of a personal experience in Korean society. More respect is accorded to someone being humble than being boastful. On the other hand, showing pride is a sign of one's confidence and is perceived as a positive action in Western culture. Therefore, Korean-American fathers have difficulty with this cultural clash. Mr. Han described his experience and described in this way:

I think that expression of pride is highly validated in Western culture. On the other hand, I am more used to the Korean culture of being humble and not expressing one's pride. So, the difference becomes tricky and difficult to overcome at times.

Despite difficulties that the Korean-American fathers encountered due to cultural discrepancy in expressing pride, Korean-American fathers had positive feelings toward the emotional experience of pride. In their description, pride was viewed as a source of motivational, encouragement, as well as an assurance that allows one to pursue and achieve his goals. In addition, many Korean-American fathers in this study shared examples of their family members being proud of them, which brings pride in themselves, as well as they also being proud of their family.

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Perceptions of their Children's Sadness*

The interview started with the following question: "What is it like when \_\_\_\_\_ (name of participant's child) is sad?" Next, fathers were asked how they recognize the sadness in their children. In response, ten Korean-American fathers indicated that they

notice their children feeling sad based on obvious changes like in their facial expressions or behavior, for example when their children were crying or when they went to their room to be alone. Two of the Korean-American fathers responded that they observed more anger than sadness in their children.

In addition to these two Korean-American fathers, a large number of Korean fathers also seemed to experience some confusion, unless their children express both emotions in sequence or simultaneously. When asked for a recent example of when their children were feeling sad, 75% of the Korean-American fathers shared situations where they perceived their children as experiencing both sadness and anger. One of the reasons for the confusion could be related to the cause of the sadness in the children. The common cause of the sadness for their children was when their wish was not fulfilled. A few Korean-American fathers also discussed incidents related to sibling rivalry, which they also explained in their own childhood.

All of the Korean-American fathers reported that their children mainly need support from their parents when coping with sadness. Based on the Korean-American fathers' observations, their children will seek comfort from their parents, usually mother before father. To cope, their children will do things that they enjoy, for example, drawing or playing without engaging any other family members. In addition, the Korean-American fathers reported that their children often quickly overcome their sadness.

Despite Korean-American fathers' observation that their children's moods change quickly, all twelve Korean-American fathers reported feeling sympathetic when seeing their children experiencing sadness and having the ardent hope that they could to take away the sadness from their children. However, there were differences in the

approaches or actions that the fathers might take in their effort to comfort their child.

These are illustrated in statements from Mr. Doh, Mr. Lee, and Mr. Noh:

Mr. Doh: When my son is sad, I feel pain in my heart. I know that feeling sad is an important part of life, but I still feel sad for him, especially when I see him crying. At times, I play the role of a mediator between my wife and my son when I think her discipline seems to be making him feel too sad. Then, my son quickly recovers from his sadness thinking that I am on his side.

Mr. Lee: My heart aches when my child is sad. Sometimes, I hug my daughter when she is crying or trying to change the environment. I would offer her to go to different places or do something different. Sometimes I act funny to make her laugh, though I leave her alone at times.

Mr. Noh: When my child is sad, I think, as a father, I have the responsibility to figure out what is the cause of my child's sadness so that I can solve or take away the problem. So, I would ask my child what he is sad about and try to help him by encouraging him to talk about his sadness with me.

With regard to the fathers' efforts to comfort their children when they feel sad, 83% had a message or lesson that they would share with their children. For those fathers who tried to share their ideas on sadness, the children listened respectfully to their fathers' input on sadness, though they may not have understood it well. At least that was how these Korean-American fathers perceived. Here are some examples:

Mr. Kwon: It's not good to dwell in sadness for a prolonged time, so I would like to tell my son to express his sadness and not repress it. I also want to tell him to share his emotions with his father or mother or even to his friends when he is ready to talk about his feelings like sadness. I will be always willing to listen when he would like to talk. That was how I experienced my sadness. My son listens well and as evidence, my son often seeks his mother's comfort.

Mr. Yim: Sadness is something natural and everyone goes through experiencing sadness. It's normal and natural to feel sad; however, if it goes too long, then it's bad for you. You want to emphasize the happy side more. My son will listen, but he will respond like, 'Yeah, but blah, blah, blah...'

About 27% of the participants shared how they had not thought about the message or lesson yet because their children are at an age too young to understand.

*Korean-American Fathers' Perception of their Children's Anger*

All of the Korean-American fathers responded, without hesitation, that they can recognize when their children are experiencing anger or frustration. Four of the Korean-American fathers described how they sometimes observe their children reacting angrily just like their fathers do. Mr. Yim describes his observation of his daughter: "As if she is trying to prove that she is my daughter, she shows and expresses her anger in a very obvious way. She would cross her arms and has an angry face." Similar to Mr. Yim, many of the fathers described how their children will let them know when they are angry. They will either verbally or nonverbally express that they are angry. When their children get angry, the common response of the Korean-American fathers in the study was to try to explain the situation in an effort to solve the child's problem. Here are some examples:

Mr. Choi: My son will not talk when he gets angry and stays in his room alone. If his anger has a direct causal relationship with me, I try to explain the situation and talk it out with him. However, if the cause is based on his own selfish reason, then I leave him alone until he realize what he has done was wrong.

Mr. Han: I accept my son's experience of anger as something natural. At the same time, I have two different types of responses in regard to his anger. There are times I accept and let him know that I understand his feelings. Other times I end up yelling at him. But in general, I try to comfort him if he is angry.

Mr. Lee: When my daughter is angry, I try to find the cause of her anger and try to talk about it with her. There are times that she'll express her anger and stay in her room. But most of the times, she recovers from her anger after talking about it with me.

In talking about their children's anger and their responses, many of Korean-American fathers (n=10) often questioned whether they might be the cause of their children's anger. If they determined that they have caused the situation that brought anger to their children,

they would immediately take action to comfort their children. One of the common actions that the Korean-American fathers took was to do an activity with their child, for example, playing a game or sport together.

Korean-American fathers generally expressed higher expectations for their sons. They reported being more strict in limiting the emotional expressions of their sons. They also seemed to have more concern about their sons' losing control in expressing their anger. All of the Korean-American fathers talked about their roles in teaching children to talk about anger:

Mr. Ahn: I have been teaching him that being angry is OK, but he also needs to be aware that there are different ways to experience or deal with anger. It's not OK to physically hurt someone. Then, I will try to start the dialogue by asking him, "Do you know why God made lips? Why? To talk and to be able to solve problems more wisely just like tears are to be used to experience sadness."

Mr. Kwon: I would like to teach him to express his anger, yet I would like to teach him the safe ways to express his anger. For instance, I would like him to learn to express his anger without provoking anger in someone else. Right now, I am taking a permissive role for his anger, but once he gets older, then I will share different coping skills, like walking or playing a sport, which I learned to be helpful based on my own experiences.

#### *Korean-American Father's Perception of their Children's Affection*

Compared to the two previous sections, during this section of the interview, the interviewer observed more active engagement from the Korean-American fathers when sharing their perceptions of their children's experience of affection. All the Korean-American fathers shared how much they loved seeing their children be affectionate. All of their children were reported to be openly expressive of their emotions to their parents both physically and verbally. Only about half of the Korean-American fathers indicated that they responded to their children's expression of affection physically. The other half

reported that they were more likely to respond verbally or be smiling. Here are some examples:

Mr. Doh: My son expresses his affection so well. He hugs me all the time. I always try to save some time for us to have dad and son's quality time. It's very different from my generation. For their generation, they openly and easily express their emotions. So I am actually learning from my son about sharing love and affection within our family.

Mr. Kim: My daughter will often give me a kiss, leave me a note, and put a card or her drawing in my office. She always says she loves me. I give her hug, smile and say I love her, too. I think to myself that this is the reason that I live. She is the oldest daughter and always wants to do something for me and my wife.

Mr. Noh: I have difficult time answering those questions because I don't get much chance to spend time with my children. But I love them and try to show my love to them. I will hug my child when he hugs me or I will tap on his shoulder as a sign of encouragement.

Similar to Mr. Noh, Korean-American fathers feel shy in expressing their affection outwardly. They reported that their wives are the main ones who primarily teach or share affection for their children. The common reasons for this particular group of Korean-American fathers were that they were too busy working for their family or they felt unsure of how to express affection appropriately.

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Perception on Pride in their Children*

In terms of pride, all of the Korean-American fathers emphasized the importance of their children experiencing pride and especially being proud of themselves but in a humble way. The Korean-American fathers shared how the parents' encouragements play a major role in developing their children's self-esteem and self-confidence. Here are some examples:

Mr. Doh: People of my age should be thinking about wrapping up their past achievements. But for children who are growing up, without pride, they can't grow or get the motivation to pursue the next stage in their life. Regardless of

what my children is interested in pursuing, like sport, music, or art; pride and self-confidence will lead to follow after their hope and dreams.

Mr. Park: My child knows that he doesn't do well academically, so he gets stress about that. So when my son makes any progress, even a little bit, I will clap hands, hug him and compliment him for his effort. When parents encourage and acknowledge the effort that their child has put in regardless of the result, then the child tries harder and gets to do a better job.

Mr. Ryu: Pride is something that I didn't get to experience or get to build in my life. So, I am trying to remind my son to be proud of who himself. For immigrants, being the minority, it is very important to have pride in you to succeed in this society. Therefore, I try to train my son in building his self-confidence and pride by complimenting his accomplishments.

The participants had their own ways of instilling confidence in their children although there was the common theme of parents both verbally and physically expressing pride in their children. At the same time, all the participants had a future plan for teaching their children to understand the fine line between being proud of what they have done or what they have accomplished and being conceited. Here are a few examples of the messages from Korean-American fathers to their children in regard of pride.

Mr. Choi: Pride is like a sword with two different sides. The sword needs to be used wisely and with caution to be helpful for the person who uses. Just like the sword, if someone is being prideful with no effort or proof, it is simply being conceited. It's very important to build the skills and effort to achieve what you'll be proud of instead of just talking about what you think you can do.

Mr. Kim: Regardless of the situations or what others say, you are who you are. No one else can replace you.

Mr. Lee: You are such a special and precious person. You are precious to me and to God.

Mr. Park: Pride is not something to brag about to others. It's important to be someone who is willing to help others, rather than thinking or acting as if you are better than others. True pride comes from when you willingly sacrifice for others.

*Korean-American Fathers' Perspective on Their Wives' Experience of Sadness*

In this section, the Korean-American fathers were asked to describe their perceptions of their wives' experience of sadness. In terms of sadness, half of the participants stated that their wives express their sadness outwardly, like crying. However, the other half said their wives would not; for example, they would instead sleep it off. Despite the differences in the expression of the emotions, all the Korean-American fathers said that they do not have much difficulty recognizing their wives' sadness. After living together as a married couple over ten years, many Korean-American fathers explained that they know what the other person is thinking or feeling just by looking into the other's eyes.

To share some examples, some of the Korean-American fathers responded to the question "What is it like when \_\_\_\_ (name of participant's spouse) is sad? What does she do when she is sad?" A common theme among the responses of participants was that their wives' sadness is experienced not only by the wives, but becomes the sadness of the whole family.

Mr. Ahn: It's weird. When my wife is sad, the whole family is sad. She was sad when her father passed away and the whole atmosphere of the family was down. It was really hard, though our family respected her process of grieving. But, she soon came back to her old self because she is a very optimistic person. I have no problem recognizing my wife when she is sad because she is my wife.

Mr. Baek: She keeps her sadness to herself just like me. She cries alone or cries while she is asleep. Because she tends to handle her emotions on her own, it's not always easy to recognize when she is sad, though I would know. After the death of her parents, she often expresses feeling lonely more than feeling sad.

Mr. Park: I can quickly recognize when she is sad because we've been married over the past 10 years and she doesn't talk when she is sad.

In terms of the wives' coping styles, the Korean-American fathers' responses were divided into two groups, though the underlying theme was to physically do



something. One group described how shopping or talking with friends helped their wives cope with their sadness; whereas, the other group mentioned that, for their wives, finding work to do, such as, cleaning the house, was helpful.

While about half of the Korean-American fathers used the technique of having more conversations with their wives' about their sadness, the other half responded that it is important to give some private time to their wives and respect their preferences. The techniques were different; however, many of the Korean-American fathers (n=10) shared respecting their wives' style of coping with their sadness had been helping them to maintain stronger marital relationships. They also described how the sadness of their wives is very closely related to their family, where the participants described in ways similar to their own experiences of sadness. These are a couple of the examples:

Mr. Choi: Our family members are very similar in response to sadness. We all have tendency to take some time privately in response to our sadness. I tried to comfort my wife, but I know that time is the best solution for her to cope with her sadness. So, I would more likely give and respect for her to have some time alone.

Mr. Noh: Nowadays, sadness of my wife is my sadness. We think the same and we feel the same. Also, often the sadness of my wife is about our family. The period of time when you feel sad for your own personal matter no longer applies for to us. When my wife is sad, I feel sad and I remind myself to be a better husband for her.

Mr. Ryu: It's all the same. My child's sadness, my wife's sadness, or mine; those are all part of my life. We all share our sadness and comfort each other because we are a family. I try to be available when my wife wants to talk with me about her sadness.

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Perspective on Their Wives' Experience of Anger*

All of the Korean-American fathers were well aware of their wives' experiences of anger. Most of them would notice just by the changes in their wives' tone of voice or

their facial expressions. Seven Korean-American fathers shared how much they appreciate their wives' open expression of anger because it gives them a clear idea when their wives may need some comfort. Mr. Ahn describes his wife's experience of anger:

You could tell. Her voice is getting louder like a tiger or lion showing their teeth. (Laughter) You could tell right away when she gets angry. She doesn't get physically violent, but you could see the steam coming out from her head. She does a lot of screaming and yelling. I guess she releases her tension or her anger by doing so.

Two Korean-American fathers shared how their wives' expression of anger changed from a quiet response to a more outward expression. Both of these fathers reported that they actually appreciate and are glad that their wives express their emotions outwardly. They believe that one is healthy; one can express one's emotional expression like anger. On the other hand, three of Korean-American fathers shared how their wives would not talk and would avoid interacting with family members. Mr. Baek describes his wife's anger:

It's very scary. (Laughter) Once she is angry, then she doesn't talk. She just stops talking. You could tell from her facial expression. She will do some work or cooking or go to shopping, which seemed to help in coping with her anger.

In terms of the wives' anger, all of the Korean-American fathers were accepting and respectful of their wives' experiences of anger. However, they also shared how they hope their wives' anger is short-lived. Similar to sadness, the Korean-American fathers perceived their wives' anger as more likely to have an impact on the entire family and not just her alone.

Korean-American fathers (n=10) also shared that they were more likely to get into an argument with their wives if there was a conflict between the couple. In most cases, the Korean-American fathers reported that talking always helps not only in dissipating the anger but also in understanding each other's values and thoughts. Those Korean-

American fathers used examples of how their actions or words evoked anger in their wives, e.g. coming home late and being drunk. In those cases, the Korean-American fathers are likely to take responsibility for their actions and apologize to their wives to resolve the conflict.

*Korean-American Fathers' Perspective on Their Wives' Experience of Affection*

About 75% of the Korean-American fathers shared that they know when their wives feel affection toward them or their children, though they may not express these directly. Similar to the Korean-American fathers, many of their wives also feel shy in expressing their love and affection verbally or physically. Though the questions were asked in general, the Korean-American fathers were mainly focused on sharing their love and affection between themselves and their wives.

Mr. Baek: My wife smiles a lot. She likes to talk more and also be more open-minded. She expresses her affection by showing that she is happy. I think our generation feels embarrassed or shy in expressing affection.

Mr. Noh: She looks peaceful and brighter. I can tell when she is feeling affectionate. She says that it's enough for her when I am just around or be with her.

Mr. Ryu: She looks happy and peaceful. She doesn't express in specially or outwardly, but I notice when she feels affection because we've been married for a long time. When she shows her affection, I also show my affection to her.

One-fourth of the Korean-American fathers reported that their wives express their affection more openly than themselves. The feeling of being appreciated and loved are illustrated their experience.

Mr. Ahn: She is very gentle and does so well to me, where I will get surprised by the change in her behavior. There is a big change in the food that comes to the table. I think that it is a given role for mother to show love and affection to her family. We don't have any problem openly expressing our affection to each other.

Mr. Kim: I am the one who expressed affection the most. I kiss my wife and she likes it. The difference is that she shows her love and care by her action, whereas I only do with my words. My wife is very considerate person.

In the previous section, the Korean-American fathers focused on expressing and sharing love to their children as a father. In this section, the Korean-American fathers seemed to take the role of receiving and responding more to their wives' experience of affection. All the Korean-American fathers highly valued the need and importance of their wives' experience of affection. Many of the Korean-American fathers shared how the love of their wives brings peace, love, comfort, and more energy to their lives.

#### *Husbands' Perception on Pride in their Wives*

The Korean-American fathers responded to their wives' experience of pride very positively; at the same time, they described themselves as playing the role of mediator. They will remind their wives if they seem to become too prideful. However, more than half of the Korean-American fathers (n=9) reported how their wives were unlikely to express pride. The Korean-American fathers were more likely to observe their wives looking happy than observing their expressions of pride. Two of the Korean-American fathers reflected on how pride is experienced by their wives and the impact on them as well.

Mr. Ahn: Most of times, my wife looks confident. She looks joyful and happy. She seems to experience pride when she accomplishes something. It gives me good feelings, yet I will remind her not to show too much of her pride. We often compliment each other.

Mr. Ryu: My wife looks happy and I am happy for her, too. When she does something good, then we go out to eat or celebrate. I cheer and encourage her accomplishments. Though we are not used to express pride outwardly in Korean society; at the same time, I remind her how it is important to do so in American society.

Korean-American fathers expected and reacted to their wives' experience of pride as they would respond to their own. The Korean-American fathers often attributed similarities in the experience of emotions to frequent conversations with their wives and familiarity based on long marital relationships.

During and after the interviews, many of the Korean-American fathers shared that they realized how little thought they had given to their emotional experiences. Furthermore, they felt that they were not paying enough attention to the emotional changes in their children and wives. They described the interview as difficult yet an awakening moment for them. The Korean-American fathers shared that they will try to be more attentive to their family members and their emotional experiences as a result of participation in this study.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore four emotions – sadness, anger, affection, and pride- experienced by first generation Korean-American immigrant men, and their observations of how their wives and children experience the same emotions. Due to a dearth of research on the topic of Asian American fathers’ emotional experiences, this study was intended to add some knowledge to the understandings of first generation Korean-American fathers’ emotional experiences.

The discussion chapter is divided into five sections as follows: demographics; family of origin; Korean-American fathers’ emotional experiences of sadness, anger, affection, and pride; their perceptions of children’s emotional experiences; and their perceptions of their wives’ emotional experiences.

#### *Demographics*

This research project is based on collected data from Eun Young Nahm’s dissertation project, Culture Weaves Family: A cross-cultural comparison of Korean-American and European American parental meta-emotion philosophy and its relationship to parent-child interaction at University of Washington, Department of Psychology (2006). For this study, Dr. Nahm selected the sample of twelve first generation Korean immigrant fathers who lived in the United States between three and thirty years and who had a child 8 or 9 years old in 2004 and 2005. All twelve fathers had college degrees or higher academic achievements, and identified as middle class, and Christian.

#### *Family of Origin*

As discussed in the literature review, in traditional Korean culture, emotions are

perceived as a natural phenomenon to be felt rather than something to be verbally discussed or physically shown. This was supported by all of the Korean-American fathers who reported that the emotional experiences weren't discussed among family members and they kept their feelings to themselves. For instance, expressions of sadness by Korean fathers in this study were usually related to the death of a family member or a family conflict. As discussed in the literature review, open expression of emotions in the Korean culture was not the norm. As supported by the fathers in this study, expressions of sadness were accepted only in certain situations and half of the fathers validated this.

In the same vein, only one-fourth of the fathers reported talking about their feelings to another person. The norm was that feelings like sadness are kept to oneself. In recalling their emotional experiences as a child, the Korean-American fathers commented on their parents' parenting style. They expressed how they understood their parents' parenting style to be the norm in the society; however, they had some things that they would like to modify in forming their own parenting style.

#### *Emotional Experience in Present: Sadness, anger, affection, and pride*

This part of the study mainly focused on the present emotional experience of the Korean-American fathers. Korean-American fathers discussed that the changes occurred in many areas of their lives, for example, changes in the status because they were now a father, a husband, and an immigrant in United States. In addition to these differences, the Korean-American fathers mention the cultural differences between Koreans and Westerners that they are encountering.

In experiences of sadness, this researcher observed that Korean-American fathers' report was closely matched to Korean traditional values. As discussed in the literature

review, men are expected to limit their expression of emotions. Most of the Korean fathers described their experience of sadness as repressing or keep to oneself. Even for a couple of fathers' reporting of openly expressing their sadness like crying, they would do it when they were alone rather than sharing or talking about their emotions with others.

As discussed in the literature review expression of anger was more accepted as a sign of masculinity and it was supported by Korean-American fathers' responses that they express their anger more freely than the sadness. However, Korean-American fathers currently perceived anger as something dangerous and possibly harmful; therefore, they reported being cautious in not showing much of their anger in the family. Even if they show anger, it will last a short time, i.e. raising up the voice and followed up with an apology. One of the participants shared how he wouldn't want his child to remember his dad being someone scary or aggressive.

In terms of expression of affection, about half of the Korean-American families in this study reported openly expressing their affection within their family, both verbally and physically. The other half of the group described how they feel and accept the affection as some type of positive energy source, though they do not always feel comfortable and even feel shy to express their affection outwardly. The subject and the experience of affection were closely related within family members and all of them highly validated the importance of this emotion.

Lastly, for pride, a distinct cultural difference between Korean and Western cultures was discussed. As discussed in the literature review, pride is not something that gets openly expressed as a norm in Korean traditional culture. Expressing pride could have been perceived as being prideful or boastful in Korean culture. On the other hand,



expression of one's pride is perceived and accepted as a sign of one's confidence in self and ability in Western culture. Finding a balance between the two cultures was reported as being in process by many of the Korean-American fathers.

*Korean-American Fathers' Perception of Their Children's Emotional Experiences*

According to the literature, one of the characteristics of Korean adult males is how they identify themselves after they get married and create a family. Those characteristics were played out and spoken about during the interview. With the strong influence of Confucianism, the formation of family is one of the major parts of their lives. The adult males identify themselves as a father as a primary role. Instead of seeking their own interest, they seek to build their characters as a strong father, a husband, and head of the household.

In terms of sadness and anger, Korean-American fathers had more concern and sympathy in observance of their children experiencing sadness or anger. Their first reaction was, 'What could I do, so that my child will not feel sad or get hurt?' It was as if a good father will know what to do right away to make his child to feel better. It was interesting to note more than half of the Korean-American fathers questioned whether their children's sadness was caused by them or not. Then, they would try to find ways to help their children to overcome their emotional feelings. Korean-American fathers perceived 8 or 9 year old children as too young to cope with their own feelings based on their observation of how their children will ultimately seek the support from their parents even if they may attempt to cope by themselves.

In terms of affection and pride, this researcher observed the changes in the participants to be more cheerful, as well as being more actively engaged in the interview

process when talking about their children's experiences. All of the Korean-American fathers reported how those two emotions are essential for healthy emotional development of their children. Many of the parents indicated that they would express their affection both physically and verbally to their children. In general, Korean-American fathers will respond to their children's expression of affection. A few Korean-American fathers shared how they would like to express more openly, yet they first needed to overcome feeling awkward as they were not used to expressing their emotions. In relation to gender role, Korean-American fathers expressed how they have an easier time expressing their affection with their daughters more than their sons.

#### *Korean-American Fathers' Perception of Their Wives' Emotional Experiences*

In terms of Korean-American fathers reporting on their wives' emotional experiences, the groups' responses were divided into two. One group of the Korean-American fathers described the similarities of expressing emotions between them and their wives. For an explanation, they would use traditional cultural values as a reference in describing their emotional experiences. Another group of the Korean-American fathers described the differences between them and their wives' emotional experiences in terms of gender role difference; for example, it is more acceptable for women to express emotions.

As reflected in both groups, Korean-American fathers described their wives as life long partners, who they consider more valuable than a romantic partner. They described the relationship between them and their wives to be two people who know how each other feel just by looking into the other's eyes. Therefore, most of the emotional experiences were related to family rather than between the couple. It was interesting to note how the description of their couples' interactions was often very similar to their description of their own parents.

#### *Summary*

Based on the responses from the Korean-American fathers, it was clear how many of the Korean-American fathers' emotional experiences were closely related to their interpretation of Korean traditional culture. Meanwhile, self-doubt became evident as they talked about their struggle to reconcile Western cultural style with the Confucianism based Eastern philosophy that guided their own upbringings. At the same time, they recognized the generational changes in society, where their children are not only openly expressing emotions, but they are also seeking more open discussion with their parents. Those changes are new and Korean-American fathers in this study shared how they are testing out different ways in regard to emotional expression just like they are trying different ways in raising their children.

#### *Limitations and Recommendations for the Future studies*

All the interviewers were female who were relatively younger than the Korean American fathers. Also, the interviewers used the term '(name of participant's child)'s father' in Korean as it is not polite or respectful to call an older person only by his first name. This could have some influence in how the fathers expressed their emotions. For instance, the fathers might have focused on sharing their experiences as fathers rather than as males. Also, there could be some different findings that were shared if the interviewer were males like the fathers.

Lastly, the sample size is too small for the results to be generalized. Also, there was a wide gap between the periods of time the Korean-American fathers in this study had lived in United States. It is always a challenge to recruit potential participants that meet specific criteria; however, there should be a continuous effort to reach out to

populations in conducting research whose voices are often absent in the field of Social Work.

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## APPENDIX A: FATHERS' EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

### Introduction

In this part of your visit we would like to ask you some questions about how you feel about your feelings. For example, how you might feel about different kinds of feelings like surprise. Now some people don't ever like being surprised. They hate surprise birthday parties, if you throw a surprise party for them they will want to walk away. On the other hand, some people love to be surprised and love surprising others. They will take their families on a surprise vacation and go on a little trip and not tell anybody where they are going just to surprise them. They may throw surprise parties or give surprise gifts because they want to have more of it in their lives and they go out of the way to have it. The point is that there is no right or wrong about this. People and their preferences are different. What I am going to be asking you today is about you own feelings, how you experience feelings and how you feel about these feelings. I am also going to ask you about your child's emotions and your spouse's emotions. Any questions?

### Family of Origin

We would like to learn what emotions were like in the family where you grew up. We are particularly interested in the emotions of sadness, anger, affection, and pride.

1. What was your experience with sadness like in the family where you grew up (and for you growing up in that family)?
  - a) What would you do when you are sad?
  - b) Was there anyone who was approachable (who you would go to when you were sad?)
  - c) How did your family respond to your sadness?
  
2. How about anger, what was your experience with anger like in the family where you grew up (and for you growing up in that family)?
  - a) What would you do when you are angry?
  - b) Was there anyone who was approachable (who you would go to when you were angry?)
  - c) How did your family respond to your anger?
  
3. How about affection, what was your experience with affection like in the family where you grew up (and for you growing up in that family)?
  - a) What would you do when you felt affectionate?
  - b) Was there anyone who was approachable (who you would go to when you felt affectionate?)
  - c) How did your family respond to your affection?
  
4. How about pride, what was your experience with pride like in the family where you grew up (and for you growing up in that family)?



- a) What would you do when you are feeling proud?
- b) Was there anyone who was approachable (who you would go to when you felt proud?)
- c) How did your family respond to your pride?

### Sadness

I. Let's talk about feeling sad first(*Prompt for "blue or down" IF the person doesn't seem to relate to sadness*).

1. What is it like for you to be sad?
2. What would you look like, what would I see if I saw you sad? Could I tell if you were sad?
3. How do you feel inside when you are sad?
  - a) How does sadness feel physically?
  - b) Are there any thoughts and images that go through your head?
4. Can you give me a recent example of a time when you felt sad?
5. Is there anything you do to get over feeling sad? Does it work?
6. What do you think about sadness in general?
7. How does \_\_\_\_\_ (spouse) respond to your sadness?
  - a) What might she/he do?
  - b) How do you feel about his/her response?

(Prompt for how this is different when the interviewee is sad about something the spouse has done versus sad about something else.)

## APPENDIX B: CHILD'S EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

### I. Let's talk about your child's sadness. .

8. What is it like when \_\_\_ is sad?
  - a) Can you tell when (s)he's sad? Can you tell the subtle signs?
  - b) What does s(he) look like?
  
9. What does s(he) do when sad or a little blue?
  - a) Is there anything she does to try to get over feeling sad?
  - b) Does it work?
  
10. What are your reactions, thoughts, and feelings about \_\_\_\_ (child's) sadness?
  
11. When s(he) is sad, what does that bring out in you?
  
12. How do you respond to \_\_\_\_ (child's) sadness?
  - a) What might you do?
  - b) How does s(he) respond to that? (Is it accepted or not? does it seem to help?)
  
13. Can you give me a recent or vivid example of a time that \_\_\_ (child) was sad, what happened, who said and did what? (*try to get a play-by-play account of what happened*)
  
14. If you could teach \_\_\_\_ (child) anything about sadness, what would it be?
  - a) What do you want to teach \_\_\_\_ (child) about sadness?
  - b) What would your child's reaction be to what you've taught them?

## APPENDIX C: SPOUSE'S EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

### I. Let's talk about your spouse's sadness.

1. What is it like when \_\_\_\_ (spouse) is sad?
  - a) Can you tell when (s)he's sad? Can you tell subtle signs?
  - b) What does s(he) look like?
2. What does (s)he do when sad?
  - c) Is there anything (s)he does to try to get over feeling sad?
  - d) Does it work?
3. What are your reactions, thoughts, and feelings about \_\_\_\_ (spouse's) sadness?
4. When (s)he is sad, what does that bring out in you?
5. How do you respond to \_\_\_\_ (spouse's) sadness?
  - a) What might you do?
  - b) How does (s)he respond to that?

(Prompt for how this is different when the spouse is sad about something the interviewee has done versus sad about something else.)

6. Can you give a recent or vivid example of a time that \_\_\_\_ (spouse) was sad, what happened, and who said and did what? (*try to get a play-by-play account of what happened*)
7. How does \_\_\_\_ (spouse) respond when someone else, besides you, is sad? (perhaps the other parent, sibling, friend)
  - a) Would s(he) notice?
  - b) What might s(he) do?