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# The relationship between acculturative stress and Korean immigrants' travel experiences

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**2017 TTRA CONFERENCE PAPER  
GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM**

**The relationship between acculturative stress and Korean immigrants' travel  
experiences**

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## **Purpose of the study**

Despite the rapid globalization and diversifying U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2015), immigrant tourism and travel remains a substantially unexplored topic (Huang, 2012; Philipp, 1994). Understanding U.S. immigrants' travel and tourism behaviors is important for host communities, travel planners and marketers as immigrants will constitute a growing portion of the domestic tourism market (Griffin, 2013; Horolets, 2012; Lynn, 2014). Further, when immigrants travel, their desired experiences and demands may differ from what has been considered the non-Hispanic White mainstream (Krymkowski, Manning, & Valleire, 2014). The Asian population, in particular, has rapidly increased in the United States and was the fastest growing racial group between 2000 and 2010 (Lee & Stodolska, 2016). According to U.S. Census data, driven largely by immigrants, the Asian population is projected to double to 48 million by 2060 and account for 9.3 percent of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Given the steady increase in the number of Asian immigrants, understanding their leisure and travel seems paramount (Walker & Deng, 2014) and an important research area (Stodolska, Peters, & Horolets, 2016a, 2016b; Walker, Halpenny, & Deng, 2011).

Unlike the general population, immigrants encounter unique constraints during both travel and non-travel experiences (Stodolska & Yi-Kook, 2005; Stodolska & Walker, 2007). For example, moving into a new culture, immigrants face acculturative stress which occurs as an individual attempts to resolve physical, psychological, and environmental difficulties during the acculturation process (Berry, Kim, & Boski, 1988). This stress emanates from language difficulties, perceived discrimination, social isolation, and unfamiliarity with the host culture and may constrain immigrants' leisure (Kim, 2013; Kim, Scott, & Oh, 2005; Livengood & Stodolska, 2004; Walker & Deng, 2014; Walker & Halpenny, & Deng, 2011) and travel (Huang, 2012; Lynn, 2015). Although research on immigrant leisure and sport behavior has gained attention and expanded in the twenty-first century (Harrison & Bimper, 2014), research on tourism and travel among immigrants is relatively unexplored (Huang, 2012). Within this context, even less is known about how acculturative stress might influence immigrants' travel experiences. To fill this gap, the purpose of this study is to examine and specify the relationship between acculturative stress appraisal, coping behaviors, and satisfaction in leisure travel experiences among first-generation Korean immigrants in the U.S. This study, specifically, applies Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional stress-coping theory to examine how Korean immigrants respond to and cope with acculturative stress in a leisure travel context. As Stodolska and Floyd (2016) point out, opportunities to "best provide leisure/tourism services to diverse groups should be a priority" (p. 249).

Beyond the practical nature of this research, an opportunity exists to contribute to the theoretical understanding of acculturative stress and its impact on leisure travel, a significantly wanting area of research. As such, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) If and how does acculturative stress impact onsite travel experiences among Korean immigrants?
- 2) If and how do Korean immigrants respond to and cope with acculturative stress?
- 3) What is the relationship among acculturative stress, coping, and the leisure travel experience?

## Literature Review

It is well known throughout literature that immigrants face multitude of challenges as they adjust to the new country. Acculturative stress is specific to immigrants during the acculturation process (Berry, Kim, & Mok, 1987). According to Berry (1997), acculturative stress entails behaviors and experiences disruptive to an individual and the affiliated cultural group after the person immigrates. It is characterized by “feelings of identity confusion, anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality, and isolation” (Berry & Kim, 1988, p. 634), and can be exacerbated by perceived discrimination, language difficulties, financial issues, communication difficulties, and lack of social support (Hasmi, Gross, & Scott-Young, 2014; Min, 2001; Yeh & Inose, 2002). In the context of leisure research, a growing but limited number of studies have focused on research related to immigrants’ acculturative stress, leisure benefits, and leisure constraints (Scott et al., 2006; Stack & Iwasaki, 2009; Stodolska, Peters, & Horolets, 2016a, 2016b; Kim et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2011). For instance, Stodolska et al. (2016) provided evidence that participation in recreational activities in natural environments contributed to reducing immigrants’ acculturative stress. Similarly, Ryu, Kim, and Lee (2016) noted participation in leisure activities can reduce acculturative stress. However, these studies primarily focused on the leisure’s role to ameliorate acculturative stress encountered by immigrants, rather than the role of acculturative stress on the leisure experience. A few studies suggest that acculturative stress may inhibit leisure. Scott et al. (2006) concluded immigrants who have poor English skills, lack strong ethnic group ties, and are not fully accepted by others in the United States are highly likely to be constrained by stress that accompanies acculturation. Similarly, Bengston and Schermann (2008) stated that language difficulties and unfamiliarity with laws and regulations related to outdoor recreation may limit recent immigrants’ outdoor recreation participation. Huang (2012) also suggested the greater the cultural contrast, identity conflict, and discrimination immigrants perceive, the more individuals are likely to be involved in diaspora tourism.

To date, however, less is known about how acculturative stress directly affects immigrants’ travel participation. Thus, this study aims to empirically test how acculturative stress affects onsite leisure travel experience of first-generation Korean immigrants.

In a seminal and transactional approach to stress, stress is defined as “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding individuals’ resources and endangering one’s well-being” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19). Stress can be conceptualized as a transaction between an individual and the environment (Aldwin, 1994). In leisure literature, stress has often been conceptualized as a constraint to leisure participation (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Schneider & Willehm Stanis, 2007; Schuster, Hammitt, & Moore, 2006). In these instances, stress is a leisure constraint and coping refers to cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals employ to manage a stressful conditions to participate in leisure, despite constraints. The stress appraisal process determines how and when stress is evaluated and addressed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). If stress is appraised and a person feels they can deal with a stressful situation, coping strategies are employed from which both short and long-term outcomes emerge. Within in the leisure context, these outcomes include changed participation or satisfaction levels in

recreational settings (Hammit & Patterson, 1991; Schneider & Hammit, 1995). In the travel literature, Zehrer and Crotts (2012) explored travel-related stress using this transactional stress-coping model as a theoretical background. Among a small U.S. sample, the authors found higher stress levels for pre-trip planning than any other phase as well as among males. However, this work addressed travel-related stress among a small sample and did not include the idea of acculturative stress as a personal factor. This study contributes to the literature by advancing the study of leisure constraints by providing proof-of-concept of the stress-coping model in travel experiences and immigrants' responses in coping with acculturative stress during travel periods.

### **Proposed research methods**

This study employs mixed methods: both focus group interviews as well as a survey. The scope of this study is limited to first-generation Korean immigrants and will inquire about their level of acculturative stress, travel experiences and if and how acculturative stress impacts travel.

The study site selection is in process. Possible study sites include Los Angeles and New York based on the large number of Korean residents. For the study population, first-generation Korean immigrants in the United States are selected as 1) immigrant heterogeneity within immigrant populations is important to address and, 2) little is known about Korean Americans' travel and tourism behaviors. Using purposeful criteria-based sampling strategies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Focus group participants will (a) have legally moved to the United States and be Korean American citizens or have permanent residence (moved to the United States with a legal visa); (b) have lived in the United States for less than 10 years; and (c) be 18 years of age and over. The length of stay criterion is based on the evidence that the longer individuals live in a host country (more than 10 years), the more they become acculturated to the new culture (Huh & Kim, 1984). Culturally valued locations will be used to recruit focus group participants. Specifically, focus group participants will be recruited from Korean American churches due to very high rate of church affiliation by the Korean population in the United States and the fact that new immigrants often rely on the information, support, and services for adjustment that Korean churches provide (Kim, Scott, & Oh, 2005). Similarly, churches will serve as a foundation for identifying questionnaire respondents.

### **Preliminary results**

Based on the acculturative stress and leisure travel literature, acculturative stress is expected among immigrants, and this stress is expected to constrain leisure travel participation and impact leisure-travel experience. Korean immigrants are expected to use both problem- and emotion-focused coping in response to the acculturative, and other stress. By exploring what factors influence an immigrant travelers' appraisal process, empirically verifying that the acculturative stress does create stress for the immigrants, and learning preferred coping strategies and responses, tourism managers, planners and marketers will be better able to make informed decisions to mitigate stress among immigrant travelers.

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