

A FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW STUDY OF
ACADEMIC SUCCESS AMONG GIFTED KOREAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

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(Under the Direction of TAREK C. GRANTHAM)

ABSTRACT

School success is an ethnic identifier for Asian American students, and "academic achiever" is an integral part of the identities of highly gifted Asian American students. However, few studies have been conducted to specifically examine academic achievement as an integral part of gifted Korean Americans' identity. The educational research community has not directly heard the voices of the highly gifted Korean American youths to understand their lived experiences related to extraordinary school performance. Through focus group interviews with five purposefully selected participants, the experiences of highly gifted Korean American adolescents, their academic achievement and school success were examined. The major findings indicate that exceptional academic success can be attributed to six personality factors and two contextual factors for participants in the current study. Implications of the study are discussed in light of existing research findings with suggestions for parents and educators that may help to foster continuing success for highly gifted Korean American students with similar experiences as those within this study.

INDEX WORDS: Gifted Korean American Students, Asian American Adolescents, School Success, Academic Achievement, Focus Group Interview Study

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DEDICATION

to

my deceased mother for the love she gave me, if I bear a true
ability to love others, it all originated from my mother

and

my father for bringing me into this world

and

Wang, Eunmi, my wife for her unconditional love and companionship, she will
continuously be my love as ever, and the water that floats me
so that I can keep sailing toward the beacon

“Rejoice always: pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks;
for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Thessalonians 5: 16-18.

Have courage to be yourself: *“you need courage to be creative.
Just as soon as you have a new idea, you are a minority of one.
And being a minority of one is uncomfortable – it takes courage!”*

E. Paul Torrance (1995).

Why fly: A philosophy of Creativity (p. 121).

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PREFACE

This preface serves two purposes. First, I want to justify my involvements and voices as a researcher in this paper. Second, I want to communicate to the readers of this paper with the measures of quality checks I utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. I thought the first aim is most efficiently accomplished by discussing the theoretical framework of this research in epistemological level because the readers will be equipped with the sense of paradigm-orientation through such discussion. I will delineate the specific measures of quality checks used in this study to achieve the second goal of this preface.

This study was conducted using the theoretical framework of constructivism. Crotty (1998) defined constructivism as an epistemological “*view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context*” (p. 42). While reliability and validity of quantitative research depends on measurement-instrument construction, in qualitative research, “*the researcher is the instrument*” (Patton, 2001, p. 14). The researcher as an instrument refers to the notion that qualitative researchers have come to embrace their involvement and role within research while it is claimed that quantitative researchers attempt to disassociate themselves as much as possible from the research process to ensure the objectivity of research results (Winter, 2000). In keeping with the notion that the researcher is the most vital instrument of research (Patton, 2001) and

researchers' involvements and voices are encouraged in qualitative studies (Winter, 2000), I decided to use first-person speech in this paper. Also, I present my ideas in a factual manner whenever it is appropriate.

Since “*all kinds of experiences [of an individual] are essentially subjective,*” every human experience is idiosyncratic in nature (von Glaserfeld, 1995, p. 1). Due to the idiosyncratic and subjective nature of human experiences, “*some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research*” for a measure of quality check (Golafshani, 2003, p. 602). Or at least, “*qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry*”, and qualitative research needs a different type of measure for quality check (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). While quantitative research seeks causal determination (internal validity), prediction (predictive validity), and generalization of findings (external validity), qualitative research seeks illumination and understanding of the phenomena (Hoepfl, 1997). When interpretive validity refers to accurately portraying the meaning expressed by participants to what is being studied by the researcher (Johnson & Christensen, 2004), the validity of the present study was bolstered by *member check*, which refers to sharing the interpretations and write up of a researcher with the participants and other members of the group to clear up areas of miscommunications (Maxwell, 1992). Also *low-inference descriptors* were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the present study. When the low-inference descriptors refer to a description that is phrased very similarly to the participants' accounts and the researchers' field notes, the readers can experience the actual language, dialect, and personal meanings of participants (Maxwell, 1992).

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Rationale of This Study

Over the past four decades, there have been numerous discussions on student achievement and school failure. Within this time, “*the debate over the causes and consequences of racial differences in achievement has been at the heart of nation’s social and political life*” (Wiggan, 2007, p. 310). Research results within the past four decades consistently indicate that Asian Americans have fared significantly better in their academic achievement and educational attainment than any other ethnic/racial minorities in the United States and other developed countries, paralleled to those of Jewish people (Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Sue & Okazaki, 1990 & 1991; Lynn, 1991; Glick & White, 2003; Zhou & Kim, 2006; Stevens, 2007). The label minority, as used in this paper, indicates the traditionally named ethnic/racial groups in American society: African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. The terms ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ originally referred to two different attributes of a group of people. That is, race indicated the physiological attributes of a group of people while ethnicity referred to cultural attributes (Archer & Francis, 2006). However, the two terms are used interchangeably in this paper because these terms were *socially constructed*; the members of our society constructed the definitions of these words and utilize them interchangeably (Sealey & Carter, 2001). Savage (2000) supported this view by stating that “*race now acts as a key cultural divide*” (p. 135) and suggested that race is one of the most

important cultural signifiers (Glick, & White, 2003). It has been widely recognized that Asian Americans outperform White middle class students in the areas of math, science, and engineering (Peng & Wright, 1994; Asakawa & Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; Kitano & Dijiosia, 2002; Yang, P. Q., 2004; U. S. Bureau of Census, 2004-2005). When the in-group variability is controlled and only Korean, Chinese, and Japanese students are selected from many Asian American subgroups, their academic achievement and educational attainment are significantly and consistently higher than those of White middle class students in almost every area in academics (Johnston, 2000; Kim, 2002; Chae, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2004; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

When I became aware of the above studies, I wanted to know why and how those Asian immigrant students performed exceptionally well in spite of the many disadvantages they experience in the United States of America. Being recent immigrant ethnic minorities, Asian Americans are less contextualized in the social, political, and legal realms of American society and have an enormous communication handicap (language barrier) in the English-dominant host culture. Considering such disadvantages, the excellent academic performance of Asian Americans is a remarkable phenomenon. To some researchers, this phenomenon deserves research attention to gain valuable insights from the experiences of immigrant Asian Americans for improving American educational performance in general. I think that the identification of variables which account for the extraordinary success of Asian immigrant children in the U.S. can be a meaningful contribution to the discourse of school outcomes, particularly if the identified variables have a high explanatory power pertaining to ethnic/racial inequalities in educational achievement.

There has been a considerable amount of research conducted in an attempt to explicate the academic performance and educational attainment of Asian American students (Kim, Hurh, & Kim, 1993; Hune, 2002; Foster, 2004; Chae, 2004; Yang, K. Y., 2004; Kozol, 2006). However, almost every existing study has focused on a *pan-ethnic Asian American unity perspective* (Min, 1995; Okamoto, 2003). This refers to categorizing all diverse subgroups of Asian immigrants as a single entity of Asian immigrants in the United States, regardless of their internal diversity in physical, ethnic, and cultural traits and immigration patterns (Okamoto, 2003). There exists a dearth of research on Korean American-specific topics and research subjects. This paucity of research, specific to a particular subgroup of Asian immigrants such as Korean Americans, appears to be especially pervasive in recent decades. Within the pan-ethnic Asian American unity perspective, research that singles out a particular ethnic/racial subgroup is considered less desirable, less enlightening, and less valuable.

Since context defines meaning and meaning shifts with its context (Fox, 2006), it is necessary to place the pan-ethnic Asian American perspective into the larger historic context of Asian American studies to understand the reasons why it has dominated Asian studies. Contextualism refers to an epistemological framework, when the framework provides a unique view for the analysis and understanding of occurrences in the natural and man-made worlds (Von Glaserfeld, 1995; Bandura, 2001; Brady & Prichard, 2005). Through the provision of a unique frame, context guides the kinds of questions asked, models to be applied, and analyses to be adopted (Bandura, 2006). Contextualism posits that the purpose of research is to understand the total meaning of an event, occurrence, and phenomenon, and the analysis of research is meaningful only when the research is

connected to the context in which it is being used (Bryman, 1998; Charmaz, 2000). In order to understand the pan-ethnic Asian American perspective, it is necessary to examine the inception and development of racial equity issues in American society in a broader socio-historical context.

In the socio-historical context of ethnic/racial dynamics in the United States of America, the *model minority* portrayal of Asian immigrants first came to the attention of the mass media and the research community during the 1960s when the plight of African Americans was occupying the nation's attention (Min, 1995; Nakanishi & Nishida, 1995). Many sociologists defined the 1960s as an era when the United States was agonizing over the Civil Rights movement and its aftermaths. The portrayal of Asian Americans as an industrious and successful model minority group was usually accompanied by comparisons to African Americans, as if to suggest that the diligent docility and subservient attitude of the Asian immigrants' was the ideal solution to racial discrimination and social injustice (Min, 1995; Chun, 1995). Some researchers contended that the so called 'model' behavioral traits such as subservience, unobtrusiveness, diligence, and docility were nothing but a suppressed mode of adaptation to European Americans' racist demands, resulting in a second-class mentality for Asian Americans (Min, 1995; Chun, 1995). While being treated as a second-class minority by European Americans, many Asian Americans suddenly found themselves standing at forefront of confrontations for racial equality spearheaded by African Americans and Hispanic Americans, due to the fact that many Asian Americans conducted their business in African American communities and worked as foremen in many commercial labor markets in the United States of America, among other reasons.

The socio-economic status of immigrant Asian Americans in the American racial hierarchy is well illustrated by the middleman minority thesis. The middleman minority thesis proposes that a few selected hegemonic groups in a society produce merchandise and services, and the general population in the society consume the products and the services created by the selected few producers (Min, 1995; Park, 1999; Oonk, 2006). In this economic system, the ruling group chooses an alien group to play a middleman role, distributing products to the general public because there is no intermediate group to bridge the status gap between the hegemonic producers and the mass consumers (Waldinger, 1989; Min, 1995; Min & Bozorgmehr, 2000). Yet, the middleman minority of the American capitalistic market, Asian Americans, experience racial prejudice and discriminatory treatment from the hegemonic producers due to their very middleman status. The middlemen were seldom treated as equal to the hegemonic rulers, plantation owners, or contract bidders in this economic system. At the same time, the middlemen were most likely to experience confrontations with working crews for equal or better treatment because they were posted in the first line of the hierarchical chain of labor.

Some Asian Americans became resentful of their portrayal as a successful model minority for these reasons. Many Asian Americans thought that the successful model minority stereotype was a myth and a device that pitted one ethnic minority against another (Min, 1995). Some Asian Americans thought that the White majority dodged the responsibility for confronting the demands of African Americans for racial equality by pitting Asian Americans against African Americans (Min, 1995; Suzuki, 1995; Barringer, Takeuchi & Xenos, 1995).

The internal diversity of Asian American populations has been under-studied in the research community because of the pan-ethnic Asian American portrayals. It has been a common assumption by the American public, reinforced by media, that Asian Americans are a physically and culturally indistinguishable homogeneous group (Nakanishi & Nishida, 1995). However, this assumption has little validity. Asian Americans consist of physically and culturally diverse subgroups with different languages, customs, and values (Min, 1995). Depending on the choice of particular research subjects or participants out of a myriad of Asian American subgroup populations, research often results in different findings, or even contradictory outcomes. Therefore, research selecting a specific sub-group of Asian immigrants and ignoring the internal diversity of Asian American populations produces highly foreseeable research findings, giving support to the dominance of the pan-Asian unity perspective over subgroup-specific studies. From this perspective, a particular Asian subgroup specific study that only fits into the model minority thesis is considered to be politically and racially motivated (Chun, 1995).

However, the pan-ethnic Asian unity perspective appears to over-simplify the complicated reality of American society. Jewish Americans, for example, illustrated the model minority thesis transparently (American Jewish Year Book, 2001; Goldstein, 2006). In the year 2000, there were 6,061,000 Jewish Americans living in the United States accounting for a mere two percent of the overall American population (DellaPergola, Rebhun, & Tolts, 2000; Schwartz & Schekner, 2000); however, Jewish Americans have come to wield an enormous influence in American economic, cultural, intellectual, and political life. Even though Jewish Americans comprise a tiny portion of

the U.S. population, close to half of its billionaires are Jewish Americans (Ginsberg, 1993; Lee, 2006). According to Ginsberg's study in 1993, Jewish Americans constituted more than 25 % of the elite journalists and publishers, and more than 15 % of the top ranking civil officers. It is beyond a reasonable doubt that Jewish Americans have been enormously influential in the United States, and the degree of success that such a small population has achieved could not have happened by chance.

When the term model minority is defined as an exceptional degree of success for a certain ethnic group, there is no doubt that Jewish Americans are a model minority in the United States of America. The pan-ethnic Asian American unity perspective denies the true existence of a model minority of Asian Americans in the United States. The pan-ethnic Asian unity perspective may not voluntarily promote the notion that only Jewish Americans can become a model minority; however, this perspective denies the possibility of Asian American populations to achieve a model minority status by expressing resentment against the thesis of the Asian American model minority. Both notions, that Asian Americans cannot be a model minority, or that only Jewish Americans can, are unacceptable because each contradicts the facts of American social reality.

The thesis of Asian American immigrants as a successful model minority appears to maintain a strong validity for Korean Americans in the United States. Scholars have noted that Korean immigrants appear to have an enormous potential that is commensurate with that of Jewish immigrants in many ways (Lewis, 1994). For one thing, many traditions that Korean Americans have maintained almost identically coincide with those of Jewish peoples, such as the belief that hard work leads to success and upward mobility, placing utmost value on strong family ties, reverence for traditions

and religious beliefs, and prioritizing education above all (Ramer & Sandberg, 1994). Second, both Korean Americans and Jewish Americans are concerned with retaining their language and culture, and Korean Americans have begun to look at the Jewish community as a model of how to integrate the best of modern American life with traditional values retained (Lewis, 1994). Third, Korean Americans have replaced Jews as the dominant shopkeeper class in the Los Angeles and New York areas, which may indicate that Korean Americans have successfully begun modeling the business and immigration path of the Jewish Americans of some decades past (Lewis, 1994). Fourth, Korean American students have demonstrated a remarkable academic achievement just like Jewry students did a few decades ago (Ho, 2003; Chae, 2004). The validity of the Korean model minority thesis is especially robust with academic achievement and school attainment (Lynn, 1991; Peng & Wright, 1994; Asakawa & Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Zhou & Xiong, 2005).

Academic achievement and subsequent career success are two of the most important ethnic values for many Korean Americans. The Korean culture is known to place a very high value on education, and an adequately performing school for their children to attend is one of the most important factors for many Korean Americans in deciding where to purchase their house (Korean Overseas Information Service, 1990). The most common reason for Korean American parents to immigrate to the United States is to provide good educational opportunities for their children (Korean Overseas Information Service, 1990). Academic failure is considered a family shame, not an individual student's academic deficit, and the educational success of their children is one of the most important goals and priorities for many Korean American families (Kim &

Omizo, 1996; Lee, 2005). Korean American students are persistent with their academic tasks, and they are most likely to view their environment as positive for their educational advancement even when they are facing economic and linguistic barriers (Gloria, Robinson Kuprius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999; Lee, 2005).

Contrary to other ethnic minority groups in which the notion of *acting white* applies, Korean American children are more popular among ethnic group peers when they are studious and maintaining a high grade point average (Fryer, Jr., & Torelli, 2005). In African and Hispanic American populations, however, adolescents can be stigmatized and branded as acting white for those behaviors (McNamara Horvat & Lewis, 2003). The term *acting white* refers to a set of social interactions in which minority adolescents ridicule other same-ethnicity peers for investing in behavioral characteristics of Whites, such as having an interest in ballet, raising a hand in class, and making good grades (McWhorter, 2000; McNamara Horvat & O'Connor, 2006). Historically, evidence indicates that Korean immigrants have a great faith in education as the main avenue for social upward mobility, and thus they have placed a higher emphasis on education than any other ethnic/racial group in the United States of America (Min, 1995; Goyette & Xie, 1999; Lee, 2005; Hue, 2007)). “*In ethnic minority research, one of the most remarkable phenomena has been the high educational achievement demonstrated by Asian-American groups*” such as Korean American students (Sue & Okazaki, 1990, p. 913). Overall, the results of contemporary and traditional research imply that exploring the contributing factors of the incredible academic performance of Korean American children could provide us with significant insights into fundamental educational problems in the United States (Wiggan, 2007).

The Origin of This Study

I have been a classroom teacher in three different public schools at the middle and high school levels for the last eight years. The three schools where I taught or am currently teaching are located in a rural, an urban, and a metro-Atlanta area, respectively. Regardless of grade level, school location, or class type (special, regular, or gifted), I have observed a disconnecting pattern of student ability grouping in all three schools. Most ethnic minority students are grouped in a way that they are over-represented in remedial special education or low performing classes and under-represented in gifted programs or advanced academic classes. These observations were the inspiration for the current study, and the research questions emerged from my reflections on the observed student grouping practice. Later on, I learned through my graduate studies that the practice of in-school student ability grouping exists all over the United States (Frasier, 1987; Grantham, 2003).

Among various ethnic/racial minority students in the United States, only Asian Americans have performed exceptionally well in school. I am a first-generation Korean immigrant, and have raised four second-generation Korean American children of my own. My educational and professional aspirations, as well as my hopes and expectations for the future of my four children, have driven me to delve into this particular topic with serious attention. It is my desire to make a more informed decision about my children's educational and career choices by becoming more knowledgeable about the educational performance and subsequent career choices of Korean Americans in the multi-ethnic American society. The desire to better understand the school performance of Korean Americans and their subsequent career choices has continuously reverberated in me in

my interactions with Korean American youths, especially whenever I think of the future of my own four children.

I acknowledge that academic performance and career achievement do not necessarily manifest a causal relationship. Within the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry, however, a remarkable academic achievement, accompanied by delayed gratification of more immediate desires, can be interpreted as a conscious and strategic investment to achieve later economic success and/or a higher social status, or at least a certain higher goal (Bandura, 1999). Human agent aspect of academic success and school outcome is evident when we consider that being Korean has a significant advantage for academic performance, even statistically holding constant for all other socioeconomic and contextual variables (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Moreover, academic achievements and educational outcomes are equated to the ethnic identity of immigrant Korean Americans (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). Therefore, searching for the factors that affect the educational success of Korean American children is not only a matter of intellectual inquiry and academic research, but it is also a process of finding ethnic identity at the same time. Being a first generation immigrant from Korea, having my own four second generation American children of Korean heritage, and deeply caring about the general welfare of Korean Americans, this dissertation study manifests significant implications for my immediate family, myself, and hopefully for many Korean Americans in the United States.

The Significance of This Study

Korean American studies can help young Korean descendant individuals better understand their own lives and the lives of their significant others, and thereby assist them with the social and psychological process of identity formation, integration, and reconciliation to/with mainstream American culture. Learning about the history and culture of Korean immigrants in American society and some other overseas nations might help Korean immigrant children to feel compassion and love for their parents and other elders, or at least help them better understand themselves in the socio-historical context of the United States. If a wound exists in the minds of Korean immigrant children due to their ethnic/racial minority status, language difficulties, religious beliefs, and/or cultural values, Korean American studies can help Korean immigrant children to develop the values and vision to heal that wound, and eventually develop a sense of orientation and purpose for the future. The excellent academic performance of Korean American students is almost always perceived as an ethnic attribute in recent research literature (Yang, P. Q., 2004). Examining the reasons for the remarkable academic performance of Korean American students in spite of many difficulties they experience is significant for several reasons.

First, there emerges the need to study the internal diversity of Asian Americans under the umbrella term *Asian Americans*. Not all Asians are able to meet the so-called ‘*model minority*’ standard. In some cases, differences between two Asian ethnic groups significantly outweigh their similarities. For instance, Filipinos and Koreans are both categorized as “Asians”, but their physiological characteristics, cultural traits, languages, and histories are more incongruent than similar. Internal diversity studies, specific to

Asian American ethnicity, can expand the horizon of Asian studies beyond the so-called pan-Asian unity perspective, and can strengthen the explanatory power of various theories in the field of Asian studies.

Second, it is necessary to study the school performance of immigrant minority students within the philosophical framework of the '*human agent*' perspective. The term 'human agent' refers to the idea that not only is an immigrant student being shaped and influenced by his/her environment (determinism), but the student is also actively shaping his/her environment to actualize his/her will. The human agent perspective of student-based inquiry assumes the significance of the subjective perception and interpretation of each immigrant about his/her individual transitional experiences and the highly selective immigration policy of the United States. One of the most fundamental presuppositions of education is that human beings are malleable, assuming the possibility of cultivation of human nature. From the human agent perspective, the cognitive capacity and intellectual behaviors of learners are elevated as a result of education. After all, the academic success of Korean American students must be partly due to their own conscious efforts, studiousness, and persistence. Explanation of academic success of gifted and talented Korean American students based solely on their culture, values, social structure, and intelligence or any other deterministic perspective seem fragmented and inconclusive. The human agent perspective is desirable in the analysis of educational phenomena because this is the perspective that accommodates the positive effects of immigrant students' conscious decisions, effective use of learning resources, and studious persistence. Research adopting the human agent paradigm of student-based inquiry

makes the field of Asian studies more complete in its scope and more applicable in its practice.

Third, because education seeks to elevate the general condition of human beings, educational research should impact the learner's real life, beyond a narrow concern with intellectual discourse in a positive and helpful manner. I am interested in conducting a study that elevates the lives of pertinent students, teachers, researchers and educational stake-holders, and that ameliorates their hardships and disadvantages. The knowledge produced by current research has some real life implications for me, my immediate family, and possibly some other Korean American families with academically successful gifted children because this research is purposefully focused on *double minority* populations, that is, students who are both gifted and an ethnic minority. Population size-wise, Korean immigrants are an obvious minority in the United States. Moreover, being identified as gifted students makes the participants of the present study a double minority because only about one percent of overall school student populations are served in gifted programs in the state of Georgia. Research targeting double minority populations is particularly meaningful because double minority-specific research is lacking in the field of Asian American studies.

Fourth, I disagree with the dichotomy of *school smart* and *real-world smart*. Too often, 'school smart' and 'real-world smart' are not considered the same attributes in American society. I believe school success should be better translated into socio-economic success in a democratic society. The essence of modern democracy is meritocracy. Meritocracy is a system in which advancement and privilege are distributed based on individual ability and achievement. Being school smart is a result of conscious

academic endeavors and advanced cognitive abilities; therefore, being school smart should more directly lead to real-world success in a meritocracy where social justice prevails. I hope that taking part in focus group interviews provides the participants with feelings of empowerment, encouragement, and assurance, and opportunities for enlightenment as to the meaning and value of their academic success.

Fifth, I hope to re-examine the internalized power structure in myself, my immediate family, and the participants in the current study during focus group interview sessions. In a sense, individuals are conditioned to behave the way that the current ethnic/racial power structure of the United States has indoctrinated them to behave, simply by the fact that the current racially-biased distribution of power is a social norm, and any behavior outside of this social norm is chastised. In a situation in which I cannot change the external power structure of the current *status quo* itself, I can certainly attempt to rectify the internalized (conditioned) power structure, beginning with myself, my immediate family and the participants in this study. It has been said that Koreans are too subservient to white people, but less respectful to African Americans or people of other ethnicity. Personally, I do not condone discriminating among people because of skin color, and I believe a correctional change should be made if such ethnic/racial stereotyping exists among Korean people. The most reasonable place to begin is in an examination of my own racial/ethnic stereotypes and prejudices. As I learn a valuable lesson through this research, my immediate family will be affected by my elevated racial/ethnic sensitivity and enhanced knowledge. It is also probable that I can influence the students that I teach to examine their own racial prejudices. Overall, the enlightenment of people with regard to their stereotypes, prejudices, negative mind-sets,

and inferiority/superiority complexes toward themselves and other individuals of other races/ethnicities is a dignified effort.

Sixth, this study might reap the potential benefits of an in-depth understanding of the research questions due to the fact that the participants in this study and I shared similar backgrounds, interests, and social identities. Because I shared a social identity with the participants in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, language, and a high intellectual ability, I might be especially perceptive of the nuances of the participants' communication. Thus, my personal connection to the participants may enhance the research findings.

The Research Questions of This Study

To explore the reasons for the academic success of Korean American gifted students in terms of how's and why's from the perspective of Korean American students themselves, this study proposes to examine the following specific research questions:

1. What meanings do the academically successful gifted Korean American students assign to their academic success? What are their beliefs and attitudes about/toward academic tasks, teachers, school administrators, significant others in their home and ethnic community, and the overall educational system and practice?
2. From the perspectives of the successful Korean American students, what factors do they feel contribute to their academic success? Do any other unique factors emerge beyond the traditional factors such as innate ability, cultural values, unequal social structure, and the immigrant transitional experience?

3. In what ways do the successful Korean American students feel that their participation in gifted programs affects them academically, socially, and psychologically? How do they internalize their academic success, and how does the internalized identity of academic achiever affect their external behaviors?
4. How do the successful Korean American students feel that their participation in gifted programs is perceived and interpreted by non-Korean American students, teachers, school administrators and the general American public?
5. What career aspirations do the successful Korean American gifted students have? Do they feel their school performance is related to their career choice and occupational success? If so, what evidence, belief, and reason do they hold for their conviction?
6. How do the Korean American gifted students perceive that their family and ethnic community life pertain to their academic and career success? In what ways do the gifted Korean American students see their family and ethnic community life as being conducive to their academic and career success?

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to examine the factors that affect the outstanding academic achievement of gifted Korean American students from the theoretical framework of constructivism, more specifically the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry, which values the meaning of school success from the perspective of students themselves. The human agent perspective of student-based inquiry considers that each individual student's conscious effort and strategic investment of actual study time and learning resources are the most significant contributors to actual academic success of each individual student. The human agent perspective of student-based inquiry asks, how academic achievement is defined from the perspective of the students themselves, what are the challenges and contradictions of school success, and why the students want to succeed with school outcomes. Unfortunately, however, the *"answers to these questions are unclear because they have not been given sufficient attention* (Wiggan, 2007, p. 311). In order to adequately address those research questions, I examine pertinent literature in this chapter.

Zeroing in on the overarching research question of the factors that affect the exceptional academic achievement of gifted Korean American students, it remains important to consider the academic performance of Korean American students in the context of Asian values and existing major theories about the academic performance of

ethnic/racial minority children. Many scholars have pointed out that the main factor contributing to great educational and economic success in Korea and East Asian countries is Asiatic values based on Confucianism (Lee, 2005; 2006). When *values* are defined as “*enduring beliefs that the specific modes of conduct or end-state of existence are personally or socially preferable to the opposite or converse modes of conduct or end-state of existence*” (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5), *Asiatic values* refer to the concrete tendencies or beliefs affecting Asian people’s behavior originated by Confucian philosophy (Lee, 2005). Savage (2000) stated that “*race now acts as a key cultural divide*” (p.135), and Zhou & Kim (2006) found that the academic excellence of Korean American children is now considered as an ethnic identifier. The phenomenal academic success of gifted Korean American students in the context of Asiatic values of Confucianism and major theories of academic performance of ethnic minority children have been reviewed to appropriately situate the present study with the discourse of academic performance inequality in the United States of America.

In this chapter, I will begin to discuss the academic success of Korean American children in the context of Asiatic values, *Confucianism*. I have delineated Asian Americans into three major cultural blocks according to the traditional western sociological perspective: (1) East Confucian Asian Americans, (2) Southeast refugee Asian Americans, and (3) South colonial Asian Americans. Next, I will present a brief history of the major academic achievement theories of ethnic/racial minority children, providing background and context for the discussion of academic performance inequality among various ethnic/racial minority children in the United States. Finally, I will introduce the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry approach, which is the

theoretical framework of the current study, and a perspective that accounts for the student effort, the most significant contributing factor to one's academic success.

Academic Performance of Asian American Students

“Asia has a broad scope historically and geographically due to its various ethnicities, languages, cultures, religions and thoughts” (Lee, 2005, p.8); therefore, Asian Americans are not a homogeneous population. Moreover, there is almost every imaginable ethnic/racial population in the United States of America, as this country has been rightly nicknamed a racial/ethnic melting pot or salad bowl. Thus, it is imperative to heed the fact that Asian Americans are a heterogeneous population. Some Asian Americans, such as Chinese and Japanese Americans share similarities with Korean Americans. However, there are more differences than similarities between Korean immigrants and Southeast Asian refugee immigrants. Considering the heterogeneity of Asian immigrant populations, the umbrella term ‘Asian American’ to refer to those diverse populations maintains almost no validity at all. Therefore, it is of critical importance to define ‘Asian American’ in Asian-related studies, specifying which particular ethnic subgroup of Asian immigrants is being referred to in the research. It is primarily important to specify which particular ethnic Asian Americans because ethnic differences in school achievement have been confirmed in many studies (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Glenn, 1990; Sassler, 1995) to the extent that ethnicity itself now is considered as one of the most influential identifiers of academic achievement (Glick & White, 2003; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Keeping up with the tradition of the Western sociological perspective (Min, 1995; Nakanish & Nishida, 1995), this paper identifies the three major groups of Asian

Americans, which is one of the most widely accepted categorizations of Asian American immigrants as well: the East Confucian Asian Americans, the Southeast refugee Asian Americans, and the South colonial Asian Americans. The East Asian American group refers to Korean, Japanese, and Chinese Americans. The Southeast refugee Asian American group refers to the influx of refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia at the end of the Vietnam War (1945-1975). The South colonial Asian Americans consist of Asian American populations from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, and these countries share a few hundred years of colonial rule by Western imperial nations until the beginning-20th century. This section will be followed by discussion of three major cultural blocks of Asian American populations and their academic performance.

Academic Success of Korean American Students: The East Asiatic Value of

Confucianism

The United States of America is a nation of immigrants, and immigration has reshaped the composition of the American population. As of 2000, about one tenth of Americans (10.4%) were immigrants, and about another tenth were the second generation of immigrants, having one or both parents as first generation immigrants (Glick & White, 2003). Therefore, approximately 20% of all school-age children in the United States of America have at least one immigrant parent (Jamieson, Curry, and Martinez, 2001). More specifically, the estimated number of residents of the United States in 2004 who said that they were Asians or Asian in combination with one or more other races was 14,000,000, and this group comprised 6.4 % of the total American population (The UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2006; Yang, K. Y., 2004).

Because there have cohabited almost every imaginable racial/ethnic group of people in the United States, it is necessary to contextualize Korean American populations in this country among various subgroups of Asian Americans. It is further necessary to characterize Korean Americans among various Asian American subgroups because Korean Americans are of particular research interest for the current study. Moreover, ethnic differences in school achievement have been repeatedly confirmed in both historical and contemporary studies, even in the presence of statistical controls for most other major factors accounting for academic achievement (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Glenn, 1990; Sassler, 1995). Ethnicity is one of the most important predictors of academic achievement (Glick & White, 2003; Zhou & Kim, 2006), and academic success is equated to ethnic identity. Therefore, the Korean ethnicity as it pertains to academic achievement should be reviewed.

The U.S. liberalization of immigration law in 1965 brought a massive influx of immigrants into this land. The Korean American population was less than 100,000 in 1970 and increased to nearly 1,000,000 in 1990, which is a ten-fold growth within a couple of decades (Min, 1995). The U.S. Bureau of Census data indicated that the Korean American population reached 1,226,825 in the year 2000 (U. S. Bureau of Census, 2000), and the population continued to grow to 2,087,496 in the year 2005, again a two-fold growth within a five year period (Population in the U.S.A, 2005). Korea is the third largest source country of immigration into the United States, after Mexico and the Philippines (Min, 1995). Only in recent years, perhaps because of their visibility in some prestigious colleges and universities, Korean immigrants have received a certain amount of attention from both mass media and the general public (Min, 1995; Lee, 2006).

The influences of ethnicity, nativity, language background, family structure, and family socioeconomic status are some factors that have repeatedly shown their effects on the academic achievement of ethnic minority children (Glick & White, 2003). Korean immigrant American children have achieved extraordinary academic success in the United States, even when all those aforementioned variables are statistically controlled (Johnston, 2000; Kim 2002; Foster, 2004; Zhou & Kim, 2006). The outstanding Korean American educational achievement has often been credited to a common cultural influence of Confucianism that emphasizes family honor, respect for authority, and reverence to education and discipline (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Scholarly achievement is often equated with overall success in life in Confucianism (Lee, 2005).

In keeping with Confucian values, it is noted that Korean immigrants have maintained a high level of ethnic attachment and family solidarity, higher than any other Asian ethnic groups, regardless of the length of residency (Kim, Hurh, & Kim 1993). *Ethnic attachment* or *ethnicity* is defined as the extent to which members of an ethnic/racial group maintain their native cultural traditions, consciously practice their cultural traditions, and actively participate in ethnic social networks over generations (Kibria, 2000). The strong ethnic attachment of Korean Americans is reaffirmed with more recent research as well. An unusually high percentage of Korean ethnic students were enrolled in Korean language schools or Korean language as a heritage programs in 1997; 81% of students enrolled in the beginning Korean language classes were Korean American Children, and 85% of intermediate classes and 95% of advanced classes, respectively (Lee, 2000). Also, Korean immigrants have maintained one of the strongest degree of family solidarity in the United States, demonstrated by their low rate of divorce

(Braxton, 1999) and by the number of families honoring the Confucian creed (Lee, 2005; 2006; Hue, 2007).

Not all cultures react similarly to the same environmental stimuli, and cultures differ in many ways, including academic orientation and motivation. Overall, however, scholars (Rothstein, 2000) have generally agreed that culture is one of the most relevant factors in explaining academic performance when culture is defined as a way to maintain the ethnic identity of each ethnic group or ensuring the uniqueness of each ethnicity (Lee, 2005). Koreans have their own unique culture, including spoken and written language, history, traditions, and value system. Confucianism has dominated Korea in its political, cultural, educational, legal, and societal systems for several hundred years (Lee, 2006). Confucianism began in China in the second century B.C., spread to Korea during the three kingdom period of Korea (57 B.C. - 935 A.D.), and then through Korea to Japan (Lee, 2005). From its very inception, without a doubt, Confucianism has played a dominant role in the lives of Korean people (Lee, 2005). The ultimate goal of Confucianism in terms of education is to cultivate oneself and to become a virtuous and righteous man. In practice, therefore, Confucianism is characterized by respect for authority, reverence toward scholarly achievement, perseverance with learning and discipline, and delayed gratification of immediate desires for achieving later higher goals (Rozman, 1991; Min, 1995; Zhou & Kim, 2006). The overall success of an individual life could be judged by their scholarly cultivation in Confucianism. Other than in Korea, nations such as China, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Vietnam have embraced Confucianism enthusiastically, and all of these nations have been extremely successful in academic achievement and economic advancement. Confucianism has been

the foundational bedrock on which Korean people build their educational theory, practice and system, and instructional curriculum. This complete and zealous acceptance of the Confucian philosophy as an educational ideology is hard to find in any other part of world besides East Asian countries (Lee, 2005).

Confucianism has been the most important social principle in East Asian countries such as Korea, China, and Japan (Lee, 2005). In terms of attitude, motivation, and perseverance with academic tasks, there may exist some similarities among Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese due to their shared Confucian philosophy. In fact, the majority of Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese are all racially Mongoloids (Min, 1995), and they look so much alike that members of one group often have trouble distinguishing other the members of their own ethnic group from the other two. It is found that intermarriages between the Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese in California and Hawaii are very common, most likely due to their physical and cultural similarities (Kitano, Yuang, Chai, & Hantanaka, 1984).

Most Korean immigrant students in the United States are bilingual in Korean and English. Bilingual ability may be positively associated with academic performance, although some bilingual studies found that this effect may be temporary when parents are not fluent in English (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1996; Rumbaut, 1998; Mouw & Xie, 1999). This finding is consistent with the view that bilingualism is a resource that gives immigrant and second generation Korean descendant youths access to their parents' communities and helps them to negotiate the U.S. school system (Glick & White, 2003). It is reported that the vast majority of Korean immigrants, 82% speak Korean exclusively in their homes and are affiliated with at least one Korean ethnic organization (Hurh &

Kim, 1988; Kim, Hurh, & Kim 1993), compared to 70% of Filipino Americans, and 19% of Chinese Americans (Mangiafico, 1988). This high rate of native language practice in their family life strengthens the bilingual ability of Korean immigrant students. It has been argued that language and mathematical ability are most directly relevant to one's performance in the post-school labor market (Farkas, 1996), and bilingual ability may be an additional advantage to Korean American students.

There is abundant empirical data testifying to the outstanding academic achievement and school success of Korean American and Korean immigrant students, even though completely Korean American-specific studies are lacking (Lynn, 1991; Peng & Wright, 1994; Asakawa & Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; Gloria & Ho, 2003; Zhou & Xiong, 2005). According to Rothstein, Krueger, & Turner (2006), students in Korea outperform American students on almost every comparative test, and Korean immigrant students in the United States also outperform American students in general. Among 3,913 international full time students at Harvard University in 2007-2008, the number of Korean ethnic students is 297, which is the third largest single ethnic student population out of 141 nationalities; the first is Canada with 489 students represented, and the second is China with 400 (Donga, 2007). Considering Canada and the United States share the same language and national border, and that the population of China accounts for almost 20% of the total population on Earth, it is astonishing that Korean students were the third largest group of international students.

More specifically in a 1994 study, it was noted that there were more doctoral degree holders per capita in Korea than anywhere else in the world (Lewis, 1994).

Korean descendant students represent a significant proportion of single ethnic

undergraduate students at many world-class universities such as California Institute of Technology, MIT, Stanford, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton University (Chosun, 2007). The reading performance scores of 15- year-old Korean students indicated that Korean students ranked sixth in 2000, second in 2002, and first in 2006 in a study by OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), which measured 400,000 15-year-old students across 54 developed countries (OECD, 2007). Also the same OECD study reported that math performance scores of Korean students ranked second in 2000, third in 2003, and fourth in 2006 among 54 members of developed OECD nations.

Quoting the study of Xie & Goyette in 2004, furthermore, Min Zhou & Susan Kim (2006) summarized the extraordinary school attainment of Korean immigrant Americans, stating that *“the 2000 U.S. Census shows that about one-third of Asian Americans are U.S.-born and that 50 percent of U.S.-born Asian Americans between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four have at least a bachelor’s degree--- a rate more than twenty percentage points higher than non-Hispanic Whites”* (pp. 1-2). An even more striking fact is that young children of Asian descendants from a low skilled, uneducated, poor, and refugee immigrant background are repeatedly overrepresented as high school valedictorians and academic decathlon winners in the United States (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Asian Americans make up a tiny portion of about 6% of the total population of the United States, but they encompass 13 to 33 % of the full-time undergraduate student population in some elite universities such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, MIT, and Stanford (The UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2006). In California where Asian American population tends to concentrate, Asian Americans comprise roughly 12 percent of the total population of California, but they make up a significant 37 % of the student

populations in the nine major schools in the Universities of California system (The UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2006). In 2006 at the University of California at Berkley (*where Affirmative Action was terminated in 1996*), Asian descendant students including Korean Americans accounted for 46% of all freshmen and 41% of the overall student population (Choi, 2007). This makes a stark comparison with Non-Hispanic white students at 29%, African Americans at 4%, and Hispanics at 11% in the same school year at the University of Berkley (Chosun, 2007). These statistics are indisputably powerful considering the fact that Asian Americans accounted for a mere 6.4 % of the overall American population in 2000 (The UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2006). Even more remarkable though, it should be noted that the undergraduate enrollment rate of Korean descendent Americans in national leading universities has always been higher rate than that of any other Asian Americans when only Asian descendant immigrant populations are compared (Kang, 1996; Reeves & Bennett, 2004).

Research consistently indicates that Korean American students have demonstrated excellent academic achievements (Braxton, 1999). Bennett (1995) contends that East Asian Americans, including Korean Americans, are the only exceptions to the trend that minority enrollment rates for prestigious colleges and university have continuously declined in the last two decades, in spite of *Affirmative Action*. *Affirmative Action* refers to the quota system of universities and colleges in selecting freshmen based on ethnicity and race which is supposed to be proportionate with the overall composition of the American population. Korean American-specific data are not presented here, due to the fact that the census data were not itemized by national ethnicity. However, it can be inferred from the above statistics that the proportion of Korean American students who

are attending some elite colleges and universities must be anywhere from three to seven times that of Korean Americans in the U.S. population. Considering the fact that Korean American students as a group are historically one of the strongest academic achievers even within the various Asian American populations (The UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2006), the academic performance of Korean descendents may be even more robust than the above inferred statistics indicate. Overall, all the presented descriptive statistics indisputably show that the academic success and school attainment of Korean Americans in the United States of America and in the Republic of Korea are really vigorous, certainly parallel to those of Jewish Americans at the turn of the century.

Southeast Asian American Students' Academic Performance

Following the end of the Vietnam War (1945-1975), over one million refugees and immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos arrived in the United States (U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, 1997). By the year 2000, together with their American-born children, this refugee population reached 1,814,301 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), accounting for one out of every seven Asian Americans in the United States (Rumbaut, 1995; Yang, K. Y., 2004). Unlike East Asians such as the Korean, Chinese and Japanese, the Southeast Asians from Vietnam, and Cambodia came to the United States as refugees rather than voluntary immigrants. Refugees in this study refer to the group of people who came to America without any hopes of returning to their native countries in Southeast Asia as a result of the Vietnam War. Under such refugee conditions, people came to the United States literally for the sake of survival with traumatic transition experiences, were not able to bring along their assets and properties, and had little to no preparation for their relocation.

Ogbu (1978; 1987; 1992) hypothesized that *voluntary immigrants* (those who willingly immigrate to a country) such as East Asian Americans perceive American society positively and try their best to assimilate into the value system of the majority hegemonic group because they are more optimistic about the connection between hard work and success. With optimistic convictions of a direct causal relationship between extra hard work and socio-economic success, the majority of voluntary immigrants actually succeed in the United States because of their intense hard work, and in many cases, their sacrifice of all other aspects of life except academic and monetary success. Essentially, John Ogbu assumes that the 'hegemonic value of Whiteness' is directly related to academic achievement, and Korean immigrant students assimilate the cultural values of the dominant whites; therefore, Korean immigrant students have been successful in their academic performance.

However, Southeast Asian refugees came to this nation outside of regular immigration channels as a part of the largest scale refugee resettlement program in United States history (Yang, K.Y., 2004). As devastated war refugees, the Southeast Asian immigrants were traumatized at their entrance to America with meager or no relocation preparations (Rumbaut, 1995). Consequently, research results indicated that the Southeast Asian refugee students were most populated in limited English programs in American schools, and their academic performance has not measured up to that of voluntary East Asian immigrant children (Mangiafico, 1988). This trend is confirmed again in more recent research in that "*a high percentage of Southeast (refugee) Asian Americans has severe problems with the English language*" (Yang, K. Y., 2004, p. 128). In 2000, California public schools reported serving 93,908 limited English proficiency

(LEP) students who primarily spoke the refugee Asian languages such as Hmong, Khmer, Lao, Mien, and Vietnamese in their homes (Yang, K. Y., 2004).

The refugee Americans of Southeast Asia shared a common history and experiences that distinguished them from other Asian groups (Rumbaut, 1995). As the most recently arrived Asian Americans, the substantial majority of refugees did not speak English well, and they were much younger than other Asian Americans and other Americans in general. In fact, about half of all Southeast Asian households were classified as 'linguistically isolated' in the 1990 census data (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1993). In 1998, one refugee immigrant study reported that 7,706 Khmer from Cambodia and 5,712 Vietnamese students did not speak English as their primary language (Office of Refugee and Immigrant Health, 1999). The native countries of these immigrants did not have direct colonial experience from the United States or other English speaking western nations, leaving them without English language advantages of Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis.

Perhaps due to the traumatic transitional experiences from their native countries to the United States as war refugees, the educational attainments of refugee students were significantly below those of the general United States population. When the average U.S. educational attainment was reported to be about 15.5 % college graduates and 7% with post college education, the educational attainment of the Southeast Asian refugee Americans ranged from 5.9% to 14.8% college graduates and 1.5% with post college education (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000). Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton (1990) concluded that the most disturbing finding of their research was that "*some (refugee immigrant) children have stopped trying to learn and have accepted and internalized their (learning)*

'disabilities' as their own personal attributes, not as a consequence of historical circumstances and dysfunctional instructional arrangements" (p. 104).

The low level of educational attainment of the Southeast Asian refugee Americans was in stark contrast to that of the East Asian ethnic groups because 38% of the East Asian Americans were college graduates and 14% post-college graduates, far exceeding the educational attainments of U.S. average (U. S. Bureau of Census, 2000). In the most recent research of Min Zhou & Susan Kim (2006), 50 percent of U.S.-born East Asian Americans between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four have at least a bachelor's degree- a rate more than twenty percentage points higher than that of non-Hispanic Whites. The fact that the majority of the parents of those students were voluntary immigrants appeared to play a significant role in screening out the poor and less educated East Asians from being able to come to the United States, and thus the academic achievement and educational attainment of the East Asians such as Korean Americans were significantly higher than the refugee Americans from the Southeast Asian nations.

However, the Vietnamese refugees have showed a quite different picture of academic performance in the United States, contrasting with other refugees from the Southeast Asian nations. Despite their language handicaps and traumatic refugee experiences, the Vietnamese had academic grade point average that significantly exceeded those of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Pacific Islanders, ranked forth from the top after Chinese, Asian Indians, and Korean students in comparative studies of academic performance (Terris, 1987; Kibria, 1993). Similar to the East Asian Americans, Vietnamese American students consistently outperformed all other

ethnic/racial minority groups academically (Kotkin, 1994). Even though Vietnamese American students were different from the East Asian immigrants in their initial experiences at the entrance point to America, the Vietnamese have maintained strong family and kinship ties and have emphasized education in accordance with Confucian values (Tran, 1988). In fact, Vietnam was a Chinese colony for several hundred years, and this colonization gave China a strong cultural influence on Vietnam, providing an opportunity to deeply implant the Confucian value system in colonial Vietnam (Min, 1995).

The case of Vietnamese refugees clearly shows the effect of Confucianism on academic achievement. While all other pertinent factors and experiences of Vietnamese are similar to and commensurate with those of other refugee immigrants, the academic achievement and school success of the Vietnamese simply stood out from the other refugee immigrants of Southeast Asian nations in a way that appears to be qualitatively different. In keeping with Confucian values implanted into the Vietnam society by China, the primary concern of ideal life on Earth for the Vietnamese is *filial piety*, or respect for parents and elders of the family and clan. The Confucian filial piety requires doing nothing to bring shame or danger to the family and doing one's best to bring honor and pride to the clan. Children of Confucian Vietnamese should never engage in detrimental school behavior because it would dishonor not only themselves, but their entire family and clan. And, they should put forth their utmost effort to succeed in school assignments because it brings forth achievement, honor, and pride not only to the students themselves, but to their parents and their entire clan. In conclusion, Vietnamese refugee immigrants

appear to demonstrate the indisputable positive effects of Confucianism on academic achievement and school success.

South Colonial Asian American Students' Academic Performance

Asian Indian Americans and Filipino Americans add a significant diversity to the Asian American populations in the United States in their physical, ethnic, and cultural aspects. Asian Indian Americans and Filipino Americans were chosen to examine their academic achievement and school success because the individuals of these ethnic backgrounds have used English as their official educational language for some hundreds of years due to Western colonial rule during the imperial era up until the beginning-20th century (Min, 1995). The colonial experiences made fundamental changes in those nations, not only limited to the language, but also extending to their beliefs, values, economic systems, religions and educational practices. During the colonial epoch, those colonized nations experienced immeasurable fundamental changes in their education system including school curricula, language of instruction, and educational goals. During the colonial period, the goal of education in many Asian colonies was to produce low rank civil officers to sustain the Western colonial rule, and the children had to learn the imperialist curriculum in the Western language (Hue, 2007). The colonial rule laid a socio-historical path for those colonized Asian nations, which is so different from the East Asian Confucian countries as to merit a separate section in the literature review.

Research on the Asian Indian immigrant experience in the United States is very limited (Sheth, 1995). Neither American nor ethnic Indian scholars have given this group of immigrants sufficient research attention (Nandi, 1980). There is no doubt, however, that Asian Indian immigrants have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement and

educational attainment in the United States (Terris, 1987). Asian Indian Americans ranked the second from the top in their academic performance in the study of Kibria (1993), in which the academic performance of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Pacific Islanders, Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, and Vietnamese Americans was compared.

The two factors that appear to be most significant in accounting for the surprising success in academic achievement and educational attainment among Asian Indians are their English speaking ability and the highly selective immigration policy of the United States. Due to their several hundred years as a British colony, many Asian Indians learned to speak English like or as native speakers. This language facility of Asian Indian immigrants expedited their academic success because they could play on a level ground with English monolingual American children. According to the census data in 1990, Asian Indian immigrants have an exceptionally high level of education, with 44.0% of Asian Indian immigrants having a four-year college education and 20.7% having some graduate level education (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1993, Table 3). The exceptional educational attainment of Asian Indian immigrants is illuminating when compared with the U. S. average: 20.3% of United States citizens had a four-year college education and 7.2% had a master's degree in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1993). The United States immigration policy, granting legal residency only to the selected highly educated Asian Indians appears to be one of the most significant factors to explain the phenomenal educational attainment of Asian Indian immigrants.

The Philippines consists of more than 7, 000 islands, and had been colonized for about 300 years by Spain and the United States of America (Agabayni-Siewert & Revilla,

1995). The Filipinos converted to Catholicism under colonial rule by Spain, and their names, especially surnames, have been Spanish for about 300 years. In public schools, Filipinos have used English for more than 100 years as an official educational and administrative language. Even scholars who specialize in Filipino studies experienced much difficulty in delineating the ethnicity and culture of Filipinos due to their internal diversity (Agabayni-Siewert & Revilla, 1995).

Even though Filipino immigrants have demonstrated the same English speaking ability as Asian Indians, the United States immigration policy has been less strenuous with Filipinos; perhaps because the Philippines had been a colony of the United States for about 100 years (Agabayni-Siewert & Revilla, 1995). The college enrollment rate of Filipino Americans is significantly lower than that of East Asian immigrants, and their graduation rate of only 40% is much lower than that of other Asian groups (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1993). Tamayo-Lott (1980) suggested that the low educational and socioeconomic achievements of Filipino Americans were partly due to the less strenuous immigration policy. Because Filipinos were to serve as housemaids for American sailors at the turn of the century, U. S. immigration policy did not screen out less educated and poor Filipinos. Tamayo-Lott (1980) also suggested that the colonial mentality, assumed from their immigrant parents, might have negatively influenced the immigrant descendents of Filipinos. The colonial mentality refers to the mindset of learned helplessness of the people from colonies, the belief that they cannot be equal to their Western superiors, such as higher-ranked workers, employers, and landlords, no matter how hard they work.

Theories about Academic Achievement of Ethnic Minority Children

Researchers, policy makers, and educators have long been interested in improving the academic performance of students. Over the past few decades, there has been a wealth of discussions about students' academic achievement and school failure (Bailey & Boykin, 2001; Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003; Corwin, Venegas, & Oliverez, 2004; Kozol, 2006; Stevens, 2007). Within this time, the debates over the causes and consequences of ethnic/racial differences in academic achievement have been at the heart of educational discussions in the United States (Wiggan, 2007). A research tradition is defined as a set of studies developed over a certain period time which explore the relationship between educational performance and race/ethnicity in a similar way by focusing on similar research questions, units of analysis, and the use of a similar set of research methods to achieve the research goals. Stevens (2007) identified five major research traditions of academic performance inequality: 1) biological race/ethnicity disparity 2) sociological racial inequality 3) instructional mechanism and school effectiveness 4) cultural value difference, and 5) educational input to social outcome justification. Focusing more specifically on the academic success of Korean American students in the United States, Eun-Young Kim (1993) and Eunjung Kim (2002) delineated three traditional theories that account for the relationship between educational achievement and Korean ethnicity: 1) biological 2) cultural, and 3) structural inequality theories. Most recently, Wiggan (2007) proposed a human agent perspective of student-based inquiry, in which students have voices about their academic performance and the students themselves are treated as the most critical agents in educational achievement. The human agent perspective of student-based inquiry addresses how students themselves

define school achievement, as well as what students do, feel, and think about their academic achievement and the reasons that the students perceive and behave the way that they do. The proposal of human agent perspective of student-based inquiry seems to be rightfully justified in explaining the relationship between academic performance and race/ethnicity because students themselves should be the most important factor affecting their academic achievement and school success.

In response to the proposal of Wiggan (2007) and in keeping with Kim (1993) and Kim (2002), this paper suggests that the four most influential theories about the extraordinary academic achievements of Korean American students of immigrant descent are: 1) biological theory 2) cultural theory 3) structural inequality theory, and 4) human agent perspective of student-based inquiry approach. The biological theory posits that academic performance inequality is caused by differing intellectual capacities among different races/ethnicities. The cultural theory assumes that a particular cultural value of a specific ethnic group is more advantageous to academic achievement than those of other ethnic groups. The structural inequality theory presumes that the overall socio-economic structure of the United States has favored the White majority; therefore, ethnic/racial minority children have failed in academic achievement. Finally, the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry accounts for the importance of students themselves in their academic performance, in addition to existing structural and cultural factors. For this reason, I chose the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry for the theoretical framework of the current dissertation study. This section will be followed by discussions of biological theory, cultural theory, structural inequality theory, and the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry.

Biological Theory

The biological theory assumes that a genetic intellectual capacity difference among different racial groups is the factor that explains the academic success of Korean American students. Due to the incendiary nature of the genetic superiority/inferiority assertion, its influence has continuously deteriorated in the academic community, even though this theory was the first scientific explanation of human beings' intellectual capacity differences and subsequent academic performance. This genetic determinism was the prevailing scientific explanation up until just three decades ago (Stewart, 1996). Now, however, the biological theory is considered obsolete and has been repudiated in most recent research (Wiggan, 2007).

Even though the biological theory may have been dormant and has diminished in its influence for the past few decades, it is still alive and occasionally combusts our whole society with intense debates with racial tension. As recent as the year 2007, for instance, Nobel Prize recipient, James Watson who discovered DNA's molecular structure in 1962, ignited an intense debate all over the world by stating, "*all our social policies are based on the fact that their (African descendant people's) intelligence is the same as ours (European descendant people's) – whereas all the testing says not really*" (The Associate Press, 2007). Even though Watson recanted his statements and offered a mortified apology on a later occasion, it was reported that he still expects that racial differences in DNA structure will be discovered within 10 years (The Associate Press, 2007).

For a long time, biological determinism and the superiority of a particular race have been the prevailing arguments in debates about racial differences in intelligence and performance in various testing. Terman (1916) argued that there were vast individual

differences in human mental endowments, which affected people's ability to learn from schooling and their subsequent academic performance. In keeping with the racial difference theory tradition, many researchers have attempted to explain differences in academic achievement by arguing that discrepancies in academic performance are caused by genetic deficiencies. The genetic perspective asserted that there are immutable hereditary differences that separate different racial groups and those disparities in academic achievement and social status are the results of genetic variations in intelligence (Hallinan, 2001). This genetic deterministic theory equates the educational performance with the intellectual superiority of Korean American students over that of various racial groups in the United States.

Some extreme genetic deterministic theorists have argued that a student's academic performance is primarily determined by their individual genetic constructs; therefore, external interventions to remedy the identified academic deficiencies may have little or only temporary effects on academic achievement (Scarr, 1992). Within the genetic deterministic perspective, the validity of school achievement intervention programs such as Head Start, Affirmative Action, and No Child Left Behind is seriously questioned because such external remedial interventions would not overcome individual hereditary deficits in intelligence. If racial differences in achievement are genetic, remedial instructional interventions are basically useless (Gamoran, 2001). Lynn and Vanhanen (2002) proposed that the genetic deterministic theory has been validated across various cultures and ethnic groups. The poverty problems of many African nations and the economic prosperity of many Western European and Eastern Asian countries are most highly correlated with the average IQ of their populations. The contention is that

international differences in wealth distribution and academic performance are explained by the innate IQ differences of overall populations first and foremost.

Madhere (1995) challenged the genetic determinism theory to explain academic achievement, social accomplishment, and economic success, arguing that the achievement of an individual is often a socially constructed outcome that cannot be viewed completely as a result of innate intelligence. Moreover, Gardener (1999) found that intelligence is multidimensional and cannot be measured accurately by a one-dimensional intelligence test or any other uni-dimensional ability test. Therefore, a high score on an IQ test does not necessarily mean that the individual's overall intellectual capacity is superior to other individuals with a low IQ score on the same test. In addition, Gardener (1999) found that intelligence or ability changes over time when an individual is provided with better access to high quality nutritional, environmental, economic, and educational stimuli for a sufficient amount of time. The theory of genetic determinism of academic performance fails to offer a logically coherent answer to the preceding theoretical and empirical challenges. Furthermore, because the theory of genetic deficiency is biologically deterministic, it fails to consider the equally convincing non-biological factors such as socialization, human-agency, or the effects of quality instruction in its paradigm; therefore, biological theory is limited in its explanatory power in accounting for the relationship between academic school performance and ethnicity/race (Wiggan, 2007).

Cultural Theory

The cultural theory looks at the importance of ethnic/racial minorities' culture in the educational outcomes of particular ethnic and racial minority children. The cultural

explanation attributes the academic success of Korean American students to cultural compatibility and continuity with the white majority hegemonic cultural value system in the United States. From this perspective, Korean American students are more likely to succeed in school achievement because their Korean cultural values and communication styles are compatible with those of the mainstream, and thus they experience less cultural friction in their school adaptations and cultural transitions. The cultural theory may help us to understand how a Korean traditional culture that values education as a main pathway to upward social status has led Korean students to succeed with school achievement. The internalized Confucian culture of Korean American students, the culture which demands reverence for one's teacher and obedience to one's parents with utmost respect, leads the Korean American students to really succeed in school achievement because of their respect for the values of education and their own efforts (Kim, 1993; Lee, 2005).

The inception of the cultural theory of academic performance dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, when social activism against racism and racial discrimination was the ethos of the social and educational milieu (Wiggan, 2007). In keeping with the dominant philosophy of racial equality in those two decades, many researchers looked for a new way to examine academic achievement among students of different racial backgrounds. Many researchers began to link academic performance with school related-factors and social-class factors, instead of focusing on innate intelligence differences. Variances in academic performance among different races were attributed to differences in home environment, social class, and cultural values from this perspective (Glick, 1994). This

perspective was an important contribution in the academic achievement discourse because it shifted its focus from biology to sociology.

When human capital refers to a stock of productive skills, embedded knowledge, and variables such as connections to gatekeepers and insiders, the educational level, wealth, and social status of parents are important indicators of human capital, and each student is born into and being raised in different human capital settings (Wiggan, 2007). The difference in human capital has important implications for academic achievement of student because improvements in school quality and resources are all affected by parents' human capital (Orr, 2003). Schools that White majority students go to are more likely to provide richer school experiences and learning resources than poor ethnic minority schools, and this may link to the academic achievement disparity among students of different racial backgrounds (Hanushek, 1989). Finding an overall significant relationship between school resources and academic achievement, Condron and Roscigno (2003) concluded that spending aimed at improving the quality of instruction is related to improvements in students' academic achievements. In addition, students from lower social classes and racial/ethnic minority students do not possess the habits and attitudes of the middle class, nor do they speak the standard educational language, and this disadvantage and lack of cultural capital put the minority students in a situation in which it is more difficult for them to be high academic achievers (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995). The contention of all of the afore-cited studies is that children who live in a 'culture of poverty' are disadvantaged, and those disadvantages cause significant negative effects; therefore, they are low academic achievers.

In a more micro-level cultural difference analysis, language and social class are forces that restrict the academic achievement of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. DeMarrais and LeCompte (1995) argued that the language use of middle class families tends to be rich and elaborate and implied sets of logical operation that facilitate their children's academic achievement. On the contrary, students from low income family backgrounds are relatively limited in their language development and logical perception compared to their counterparts of rich backgrounds, which in turn negatively affects their academic performance. Furthermore, Burkam, Ready, Lee, and LoGerfo (2004) identified a huge chasm of social stratification in children's summer learning experiences regarding general knowledge, mathematics, and literacy. During those almost three months of summer break, upper class families provided even richer learning opportunities than during their regular school session period, while their lower class counterparts didn't receive any learning opportunities. Clearly, parental education and class influence student academic achievement.

Kim (1993) delineated two criteria, money and prestige, that many Korean American immigrants consider the evidence of success with their 'American Dream.' Many immigrant Korean families are motivated to hoard material possessions so that they can establish an appropriate monetary reservoir to lay stepping stones to achieving prestigious social status. For many Korean American immigrant parents, social prestige is synonymous with the academic achievement of their children (Kim, 1993). Korean American immigrants have maintained a very pragmatic 'American Dream', and their American dream is summarized as: Whereas first generation immigrants should make it through 'hard work' in their small business, their children who were born in the United

States or came to the United States at a very early age and therefore do not have language barrier should study hard, go to the most prestigious schools, and become a highly regarded professional (Kim, 1993).

The first generations pragmatic view of their children's future can be interpreted about their future of Korean American students can be interpreted as a result of their Confucian value system. The Confucian cultural values maintained by many Korean immigrants place a high priority on ambition, persistence, deferred gratification, and a strong desire for upward social mobility, and these values contribute to and facilitate the academic success of Korean American students in the United States where other ethnic minority students have not applied these values to the same degree as Korean American students have (Lee, 2006). The Confucian cultural value hypothesis is supported by recent research as well (Glick & White, 2003; Lee, 2005 & 2006; Zhou & Kim, 2006; Hue, 2007) in which Asian immigrants and second-generation youths outperformed their third- and higher-generation counterparts, when those later generation Asian students have more completely assimilated into the American mainstream culture and value system, and thus have lost their original Confucian value system compared to their older generation counterparts.

The cultural theory of academic performance disparities among different races explains the academic success of Korean American students in terms of their cultural capital and material possessions. Although there is an important relationship between academic achievement and the social class culture of students, this theory is overly deterministic, claiming that students are passive and that schools are not places of agency. It is obvious that children are unable to choose the family that they want to be born into,

the neighborhood that they want to live in, and the school that they want to attend, however, the students' academic achievement is overwhelmingly determined by their parents' social capital and material possessions in this perspective. Furthermore, it is argued that the monetary success of Korean Americans has been overly optimistically estimated. The material success of Korean Americans is often blown out of proportion by mass media and fragmented by statistics (Kim, 1995); they tend to do better than most ethnic minority groups, but are far behind the median income of majority Whites. Many statistics depict the Korean American household median income as comparable to that the white middle class, but Korean households tend to have more working members or more work hours compared to those of typical White households (Kim, 1995). Therefore, cultural capital and material possessions are inadequate to explain the outstanding academic achievement of Korean American students, especially when compared to majority White Americans. In addition, critics of cultural determinism argue that more focus should be given to the efforts and attitudes of students that ultimately affect their own school achievement and academic success (Kozol, 2006). Overall, cultural theory, either being a cultural deficit perspective for traditional ethnic minorities or cultural surplus perspective of Confucianism for the East Asian Americans, is inadequate to fully explain the outstanding academic achievement of Korean American students.

Structural Inequality Theory

The structural inequality perspective focuses on majority-minority cultural-political power relationships in American society. This approach contends that the current American institutionalized law, order, value system, and school system have been consciously and unconsciously skewed toward favoring White students and have served

to maintain an established unequal status quo (McDermott, 1977; Clark, 1983; Cummins, 2001). Therefore, ethnic minority students have been systematically disadvantaged, and thus they are not successful in academic achievement or educational attainment.

Although this theory may apply to the traditional ethnic minority groups such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, the theory fails to explain why Korean American students are so successful academically, in spite of many racial stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination they might have experienced like the other ethnic minority students. There is no evidence that Korean Americans have been treated any better than the afore-cited ethnic minority groups in American society in terms of equality and justice (Chun, 1995).

According to the structural inequality perspective, the problems of racism and mainstream White hegemony are pervasive in public schools even at a subconscious level. For instance, teachers tend to expect little from students who are not White and who are not middle class, and thus this low expectation of teachers has a negative effect on the actual performance of minority students, just like the self-fulfilling Pygmalion effect (Gamoran, 2001). This pervasive structural stereotype makes educators believe that some students cannot achieve anyway; therefore, teachers become less enthusiastic, work less, prepare less, and respond less supportively than they do to the students of a White middle class background.

On the opposite end, however, teachers put forth more efforts in their preparation for lessons, and more enthusiasm in their instruction, and respond more supportively to Korean American and White middle class students. Teachers are often biased against African, Hispanic, and Native American students of non-middle class backgrounds

because they are stereotyped to perform more poorly in this perspective. Some teachers even justify their instructional behaviors of teaching Korean American students more, and at the same time, teaching less to African Americans and other stereotyped ethnic minority students. These opinionated teachers express the sentiment that “students should get what they wish for; Asian kids learn more and Black kids learn less because that’s what they want.” The structural inequality hypothesis represents a significant shift in the discourse of educational performance and ethnicity/race because this perspective for the first time begins to explain educational achievement inequality within a pedagogical paradigm, as an alternative to a sociological explanation of innate familial, cultural, and genetic deterministic factors (Wiggan, 2007).

The communication difference hypothesis is a variation of the structural inequality theory, which focuses on the process of communication among different ethnic minority children in American schools. The communication difference hypothesis asserts that not only do White majority teachers and ethnic minority students possess different cultures and value systems, but they also differ in their communication styles, information processing preferences, and learning needs (Erickson, 1987). This communication mismatch between teachers and students makes it difficult for teachers to teach and for students to learn effectively (Wilder, 2000). There exists a universal mismatch between the instructional styles of White teachers and the learning styles of minority students in the communication difference perspective. This mismatch causes majority teachers and minority students to play into each other’s cultural blind spots (Trueba, 1988). Even though this theory explains why all the traditional ethnic minority students such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans have not been

successful in their academic achievement and educational attainment, this theory fails to explain the academic success of many Korean American students. Abundant research results indicate that many successful Korean American students have experienced difficulties in communication to the same degree or even more so compared to other ethnic minority students, due to the fact that English is their second language or their parents speak Korean exclusively at home (Asakawa & Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; Braxton, 1999; Chae, 2004; Yang, P. Q., 2004).

The voluntary immigrant vs. involuntary immigrant hypothesis of Ogbu (1978; 1987; 1992) provides a variation of the structural inequality approach. Ogbu hypothesized that voluntary immigrants such as Korean Americans perceive American society positively and try their best to assimilate into the majority hegemonic group's established value system. Therefore, voluntary immigrants succeed because they adopt the majority hegemonic group's established value system which favors the White majority and voluntary immigrants over involuntary immigrants. He contrasts this hypothesis with the notion that involuntary immigrants do not perceive American society in a positive manner. Rather, they see American society as an oppressing culture that has not only treated them unfairly but has also denied them the opportunities to advance educationally, economically, and socially (Farkas, Lleras, & Maczuga, 2002). For these reasons, involuntary immigrants have taken a stance that is antagonistic toward adopting the value system of the majority, a fact that Ogbu says contributes to minority students' lack of academic success.

Ogbu asserted that his voluntary vs. involuntary immigration hypothesis is an ecological theory because it takes into account the immigrant individuals, their socio-

political environments, and the interaction between those two factors. Even though this theory provides a profound insight into American society, this theory is incapable of accounting for the academic success of Korean American (Asian American) students in other parts of world, in which socio-political environments are very different from that of the United States. For example, Korean immigrant students and other East Asian immigrants have demonstrated outstanding academic success in the United Kingdom and some other European countries (Archer & Francis, 2006). Moreover, in Japan where cultural values are almost identical to those of Korea, the Korean immigrants tend to perform poorly, contrary to Ogbu's postulation that Korean immigrants may more easily assimilate into the Japanese mainstream (Stevens, 2007). In addition, African Americans and Hispanic students have more positive attitudes toward school than White students when they are in segregated schools with teachers of the same race (Goldsmith, 2004). This finding indicates that not all involuntarily minority students form an oppositional identity.

Student-based Inquiry Approach

Even though there have been volumes of research on academic success and school failures among children of different ethnicities/races in the United States, the foremost explanations given to ethnic/racial differences in school performance are all *deterministic*. Collectively, all of the theories and hypotheses discussed in previous sections manifest a commonality: all of those arguments are deterministic. Determinism is a philosophical “*theory or doctrine that acts of the will, occurrences in nature, or social or psychological phenomena are causally determined by preceding events or natural laws*” (Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary, 2006). All of the afore-mentioned

arguments such as genetic difference, cultural surplus or deficit, communication mismatch, and social inequality are variations of determinism. Those theories are deterministic because either heredity, culture, communication style, or the distribution of power and privilege is the ultimate preceding agent that determines the outcome of academic performance and educational attainment of ethnic minority students.

The overarching research question of the current study is a pedagogical *social science* question, a problem about *man-made phenomena*. It is generally agreed that deterministic philosophy does not explicate man-made phenomena as well as it does natural and hard science. Without considering the human agent aspects of conscious decision making, diligence, persistence, motivation, and strategic use of study time and resources of Korean American students, the discourse undertaken is incomplete and inconclusive. In order to gain a better understanding of students' viewpoints on academic achievement and school success, we may need to shift the research paradigm from the deterministic perspectives to the *human agent perspective*, which in this paper refers to the *human agent perspective of student-based inquiry*. The human agent perspective of students-based inquiry refers to “*qualitative studies that are driven by students and that explore their perspective on schools and achievement, while addressing the meanings they attach to life, given their position in the social system*” (Wiggan, 2007, p. 324).

In recent years, some researchers have argued that it is necessary to develop new perspectives on academic achievement with respect to data collected from students, and to increase the representation of students' voices in the achievement literature (Riehl, 2001). Students themselves should be empowered to voice their interpretations and give input to the academic research process because they possess first-hand knowledge that

would connect the open and fluid discourse on school success with the daily school life of students, *a concrete social reality* (Mertens, 1998). In the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry, student involvement in the research process is central, and paying attention to participants' identified problems, solutions, insights, and interpretations are critical (LeCompte & Preissle, 1992). The human agent perspective of student-based inquiry is the theoretical framework of the present dissertation research, in responding to the afore-mentioned calls for a research perspective shift.

Besides the above philosophical and theoretical significance of the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry, this perspective manifests its practical values in studying the issues of academic performance disparities among ethnic/racial minority students in the United States. First, it can complement the shortcomings of biological explanations of academic achievement inequalities. It is not low intellectual capacity that makes some children become underachievers at school (HealthDay, 2008). To make an analogy, intelligence is like the capacity of a computer's hard drive. Not many people are able to use up the whole capacity of their computer's hard drive; therefore, the capacity of the hard drive is not a limiting factor. The true power of a computer lies in its central process unit. Each individual child may be endowed with a different intellectual capacity at his/her birth; however, intelligence is not as important as some extreme biological theorists thought. Intelligence is not a limiting factor in academic achievement, unless the intellectual deficit is so severe as to be diagnosed as mental retardation, because average human beings are not able to use more than 30 percent of their total brain capacity anyway (Than, 2007). Regarding performance efficiency, the central processing unit of a computer is important; likewise, what really matters in academic performance is each

student's study habits, motivation to perform well, actual amount of study time, and most of all the degree of attentiveness. Thus, the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry could demonstrate more explanatory power in addressing issues of academic performance inequality.

Second, the human agent perspective of students-based inquiry can complete the cultural theory of academic performance disparities among different ethnic minority children. The cultural deficit perspective posits that children of non-middle class background do not have an equal amount of achievement-conducive educational resources, and this deficit causes them to perform poorly in school. On the contrary, the cultural capital perspective postulates that the Confucian values maintained by Korean American children make them succeed in school subjects because Confucianism equates academic achievement with success in life. However, it is obvious that there are some achieving and even a few overachieving non-middle class background students of ethnic minorities, and that there are many underachieving and even some failing Korean American children, which cannot be completely explained by the cultural theory. Those exceptions to the rule, which cannot be explained by cultural theory, can be logically accounted for by the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry because what a student really does in a given environment affects the student's actual academic performance.

Third and finally, the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry enhances the explanatory power of structural inequality theory in an additive and complementary manner, not as a substitute. The structural inequality theory assumes that the overall socio-economical structure including the education system of the United States has

avored the White middle class, and has sustained the *status quo* of the United States; therefore, traditionally low performing ethnic minority children have not been able to achieve a performance level commensurate with their true ability due to structural disadvantages. The structural inequality theory is fundamental, compelling, and insightful for all the traditional ethnic minority children in the United States. However, the theory appears to be irrelevant to Korean American children. No evidence exists to show that Korean American immigrants have not experienced racial discrimination or have been treated any better than those of traditional ethnic minorities such as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. Therefore, the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry makes the structural inequality theory complete.

Chapter Summary

Even though there exist a relative wealth of academic performance inequality studies, insufficient research attention has been given to the Korean American population. Moreover, there is a dearth of research which takes into account the children and students themselves as the most important factors in their own academic achievement. In order to appropriately examine the reasons for the extraordinary academic success of Korean American students in spite of many barriers such as language, discrimination, lack of American contextual knowledge, and social networks, this chapter has delineated the academic performance of Asian American children across three distinctive cultural/structural blocks. The outstanding academic success of Korean American students was presented in relation to Confucian values. Providing the background information and the social context, the academic performance of Korean

American children was examined in comparison with that of Southeast Asian American students and Western colonial Asian Americans. It was noted that Vietnamese American refugees have academically prevailed in the United States, despite their traumatic relocation experiences in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The single most influential factor that distinguished Vietnamese from other refugee immigrants was identified as Confucianism, which equates academic success with success in life on Earth.

The three most influential theories of academic achievement of ethnic minority children in the United States have been identified as biological theory, cultural theory, and structural inequality theory. Those sections were followed by the proposition of the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry. Biological theory was the first scientific theory that accounted for academic performance disparities among ethnic minority children. Even though the biological theory has diminished in its influence in the research community due to its tenet of intellectual inferiority of a specific race, it has not been completely rejected. As recently as 2007, intelligence variations across different racial groups caused an intense racial tension on a global scale. Cultural theory is divided in to the cultural deficit perspective and the cultural capital perspective. The cultural deficit perspective manifests a significant explanatory power for African American, Hispanic American, and Native American children. From the cultural capital perspective, Confucianism maintained by Korean American children in the present study is the single most dominant explanation for their extraordinary academic achievement. Structural inequality theory has been most compelling in explaining the academic performance of African involuntary immigrant populations in the United States. However, the structural inequality theory and its variation of the voluntary vs. involuntary immigrant hypothesis

are incomplete and inconclusive without the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry perspective. The human agent perspective of student-based inquiry appears to be the most useful for researching the academic success of Korean American students.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to explore the reasons for the extraordinary school success of Korean American gifted students, using a naturalistic research method, from the perspective of the participant students. I specifically examined the meanings that the academically successful gifted Korean American students assigned to their academic success, their beliefs and attitudes about academic success and the overall educational system and practice. Also, I examined how the Korean gifted children internalize their academic success and how the internalized identity of the academic achiever affects their external behavior. In keeping with the academic research tradition of scholarly rigor, the goal of this chapter is to explain the research methodology which helped to accomplish the purpose of the present study. This section is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework of the current study and the rationale for choosing that framework. Next follow the characteristics of the qualitative research design and the reasons for using the small focus group interview method for this dissertation study.

Theoretical Framework: The Student-based Inquiry Approach of Constructivism

Providing a sound rationale for adopting a specific theoretical framework of research is imperative in any research because the theoretical framework provides a guiding perspective or ideology that structures the way the research is conducted and the

way the research report is written (Creswell, 2005). The theoretical framework should be identified early on in a study to *sensitize research concepts*, that is to establish a general sense of research ideas, process, and outcomes when a researcher approaches an empirical phenomenon (Bryman, 1998). The theoretical framework and research data are tied together in that the framework provides a set of signposts for the researcher in his/her contact with a field of study, production of data, and analysis of the data (Yin, 1989). Not only does an identified theoretical framework provide a general guide for the overall research, but it also facilitates the development of the data collection instrument and helps to establish a framework for data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, being able to crystallize a theoretical framework out of many competing theories is important, particularly for a not well-seasoned researcher, because the chosen theoretical framework should provide a sense of direction and general structure for the study.

The theoretical framework chosen for this study is constructivism (Von Glasersfeld, 1995; Charmaz, 2000; Brady & Prichard, 2005) because the philosophy of constructivism postulates the '*human agent*' perspective (Poerksen, 2004). According to this perspective, not only is an individual being shaped and influenced by his/her environment, but the individual is also actively acting on his/her environment to actualize his/her will to change the surrounding social reality (Bandura, 2001; 2006). The human agent perspective of constructivism predicates that the *interpretations, constructing meaning out of lived experiences*, of gifted Korean American students are the most important factors that contribute to their phenomenal academic achievements. The overarching purpose of this study is to explore and understand the '*lived experiences*' of Korean American students focusing on their academic success. I think this purpose is best

accomplished by adopting the constructivist perspective because it may provide a new insight into identifying factors that contribute to the academic success of gifted Korean American students, which might have been not easily detected by traditional deterministic approaches. The traditional deterministic theories refer to the intellectual capacity difference theory, the cultural deficit or cultural capital theory, and the social inequality theory.

In constructivism, the perceptions and interpretations of the participants are the most real and powerful factors to explain the beliefs and behaviors of the individuals (Von Glasersfeld, 1995; Steffe & Thompson, 1999; Poerksen, 2004). The constructivists heed the fact that the subjective perceptions and interpretations of each immigrant on his/her transitional experiences from his/her native land to the United States have played more significant roles in their academic success than the deterministic theorists have asserted. In the human agent perspective of constructivism, existing identified factors and explanations of deterministic theories, whether genetic capacity differences, variations in environment or nurturing, curriculum and instruction dissimilarities, or socio-economic disparities, are secondary to the perceptions, interpretations, and consequent actual behaviors of the Korean American students themselves, an approach refers to the student-based inquiry in this paper.

Constructivists believe that knowledge “*does not reflect an ‘objective’ ontological reality, but exclusively an ordering and organizing of a world constituted by our experience*” (Von Glasersfeld, 1987, P. 199). Von Glasersfeld (1995) argued that human beings could not step out of the human ways of perceiving and conceiving objects and phenomena. According to constructivism, therefore, human beings have to perceive and

conceive the world in an idiosyncratic subjective way. From the constructivist viewpoint, the representation of an object never refers to an iconic representation of an experience-independent outside world, but it is always interpretation or meaning making, which is derived from the interpreter's experience. The fundamental question of constructivism, therefore, concerns how individuals construct knowledge, and proposes that people construct knowledge in a subjective way.

Furthermore, constructivists do not use the term *subjectivity* in the same way in which a positivist uses the term. Constructivists coined a new term *intersubjectivity* in place of subjectivity. Constructivists believe that there is no conceptual contradiction between the ideas of subjective cognitive construction and the experiential reality of social phenomena (Steffe & Thompson, 1999). They argue that the most important aspect of *epistemological* knowing is the process of constructing a necessary and sufficient interpretation to make a sense out of perceived phenomenon and make meaning out of experiences. *Epistemology* is defined as a *study of knowing in terms of what constitutes adequate knowledge* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). Within epistemological constructivism, *intersubjectivity* is the norm of human behaviors and beliefs, and *intersubjectivity* refers to the idiosyncratic interpretations of a phenomenon.

Constructivists do not believe in the existence of an absolute empirical objective phenomenon, which is completely independent from the observer. Constructivists argue that it is impossible for a person to convey precisely the same thoughts and conceptual networks that the person originally associated with an experience to his/her communication partner (Poerksen, 2004). For example, in a situation in which two individuals are talking about the same ontological entity of the color yellow, their

conceptions of the density, the texture, and the composure of yellow of the yellow they are actually referring to is almost always not identical. In his comprehensive book *Radical Constructivism: A Way of Knowing*, von Glasersfeld (1995) explained constructivism as follows:

*It starts from the assumption that knowledge, no matter how it is defined, is in the heads of persons, and that the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience. What we make of experience constitutes the only world we consciously live in. It can be sorted into many kinds, such as things, self, others, and so on. But **all kinds of experience are essentially subjective**... (p.1)*

In the constructivist perspective (von Glasersfeld, 1995), idiosyncratic lived experiences of Korean American students and their subjective interpretations about their lived experiences are not only ontologically valid but also epistemologically legitimate. Within the philosophical doctrine of constructivism, therefore, the most important factor to account for the extraordinary academic achievement of Korean American gifted students is what meanings the students make out of their superior academic achievement and educational attainment. All other factors such as heredity, socio-economic status, social capital, cultural values, or learning and communication preferences are not as important as the constructed meanings of individual Korean American gifted students, which are nonetheless idiosyncratic and intersubjective.

Contrary to constructivism, however, perceptions and interpretations are not the primary concern of any other traditional deterministic theories that have been used to explain the academic success of ethnic minority students in the United States. Because

philosophical determinism postulates an objective *causal* relationship between the behaviors of human beings and the environmental stimuli, deterministic philosophy is adversarial to the philosophy of constructivism. Constructivism assumes that human beings construct meanings out of given stimuli and this subjective and idiosyncratic constructed meaning plays a significant role in determining the behaviors of each individual (Bandura, 2006). I think that the argument for the epistemological interpretation of constructivism is logically coherent, persuasive, and powerful. Aligning with the human agent perspective of constructivism, I think that gifted Korean American students have accomplished their extraordinary academic success based on their self-assigned constructed meanings of school success, not just as a conditioned response to cultural and social variables.

After reviewing the literature, I was not completely satisfied with the existing traditional theories about the educational achievement of ethnic minorities in the United States. I thought that the traditional deterministic theories of academic achievement of ethnic minority students do not provide a comprehensive explanation, specifically about Asian Americans such as Korean American students. Asian American students, particularly Korean, Chinese, and Japanese students, have been persistently over-represented in gifted education programs and under-represented in special education programs (Frasier, 1987; Grantham, 2003; Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Erickson, 1987; Ogbu, 1992). In the United State, the academic achievement and school attainment of Korean American students have significantly and consistently exceeded those of every other ethnic minority group and White middle class students in almost every area in

academics (Asakawa & Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; Johnston, 2000; Kim, 2002; Kitano & Dijiosia, 2002; Foster, 2004; Chae, 2004).

The overarching research question of this study crystallized around my observations of the exceptional academic success of Korean American students. The aim of this study is to explore and thus better understand the lived experiences of academically successful gifted Korean American students from the perspective of the participants with a naturalistic research method. Specifically, the aim is to identify factors that affect the extraordinary school success of the participants, and I thought, those factors can be identified by asking questions such as: first, how do the successful Korean American students perceive the world around them, interpret the perceived world, construct meanings out of the perceived world, make decisions, and deal with the consequences of their decisions? Second, what personality and contextual factors are emerged in their responses? In order to adequately address those research questions in a naturalistic manner from the perspective of the participant students, the student-based inquiry approach of human agent perspective, which is an epistemological constructivism, appears to be the most useful theoretical framework to accomplish the purpose of this research.

Small Focus Group Interview Method

The characteristics of qualitative research design and the rationales for using the method for this study

Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of the participants' views, stresses the context and setting in which the participants express their views, and

highlights the meaning the individual personally holds about his/her life in those particular contexts and settings (Creswell, 2005). “*To explicate the meaning of social reality from the participants' perspectives*” (Reichardt & Rallis, 1994, p. 11) in a natural/contextual setting, qualitative research asks open-ended 'what', 'how', and 'why' questions about social reality. An open-ended question usually causes a chain of interactions between the interviewer and interviewee in a question and answer format until the what, how, and why of the research questions are sufficiently revealed.

Creswell (2005) characterized qualitative research in terms of research process in six steps. First, the purpose of qualitative research is to *explore* and *understand* a phenomenon of interest, compared to *description-* and *explanation-* oriented quantitative research. Second, literature review plays a minor role in qualitative research because findings and research results are *grounded in* participants' input, not existing theories and previous research literature. Third, the research question is general and theory-building-oriented, not specific and theory testing oriented. Fourth, data production and collection are usually in the form of texts and/or images, not numbers. Fifth, produced data are analyzed in thematic units, not probabilistic numerical models. Sixth, evaluation and reporting of research are reflexive and flexible, not prototypical and standardized.

Compared to quantitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) summarized the characteristics of qualitative research as following. First, qualitative research underscores the need to listen to the views of participants. Second, qualitative research should be conducted in a place where participants live and work, not in a constricted experimental environment. Third, qualitative research asks general and open questions to collect data, not perimeter-bounded quantifying numerical questionnaire or survey. Fourth, research

has a significant role in advocating for change and bettering the lives of involved individuals. Fifth, even though the qualitative research has been developed as an alternative to the positivistic form of quantitative research; however, it should be noted that qualitative research is developed in an additive manners, not a substitute manner to replace quantitative research.

The overarching research question for this study was to explore, from the human agent perspective of student-based inquiry approach within a constructivist paradigm, the factors that might account for the academic success of Korean American gifted students. The primary concern of this study is to identify some new factors that are related to the academic success of gifted Korean American students. Not to measure the magnitude of effect of an already identified variable to explain the academic success of Korean American gifted students in a probabilistic manner is the primary concern for this study.

Creswell (2005) asserted that qualitative research is best suited for research questions in which the researcher does not know the variables yet, and need to explore and identify contributing factors. Little knowledge is yielded about academic success of Korean American gifted students in a constructivist philosophical paradigm. In order to identify some new factors that may insightfully elucidate our understanding of academic success of Korean American student, this study chooses to be open to the contributions and inputs from the participants. Therefore, findings from present study would be grounded in real lives of the participants. Qualitative research tradition predicates that the purpose of research is to produce a new theory, or at least, a new hypothesis that significantly deepens our understanding about a phenomenon. With those research

purposes and primary concerns in mind, I concluded that a qualitative research design may most appropriately address the research questioned proposed in this study.

Specifically for the current study, a qualitative research method of focus group interview is chosen because this focus group interview method is compatible with the human agent perspective of students-based inquiry approach of constructivist research paradigm. Beck, Trombetta, and Share (1986) defined a small focus group interview as “*an informal discussion among selected individuals about specific topics*” (p. 73). “*The major advantage of focus groups over other interview techniques is that they provide the researcher with the tools to analyze not just what is said, but also the contexts and processes of interaction through which talk is produced*” (Munday, 2006, p. 102). A small focus group interview method is chosen for present study because the method produces more meaningful and contextual data (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001; Chiu & Knight, 1999).

A focus group interview is initially designed to discover why people act, think, and feel as they do in a way that values the contributions and inputs from interviewees in a less contrived setting (Bellinger, Bernhardt, & Goldstucker, 1976; Stycos, 1981). Merton (1987) indicated that a focus group interview method was designed to serve dual purposes. The first was to obtain responses to a recurrent experience from the selected participants in a less artificial setting. The second was to provide further checks for investigating a concrete experience. Those further checks for investigating a concrete experience is obtained via a permissive atmosphere in which multiple individuals talk about mutually interested issues without criticism. A small group discussion fosters a range of opinions, a more complete and revealing understanding of the issues (Stycos,

1981). The goal of a focus group interview is to create a candid, normal conversation that addresses the selected topic in depth, and a focus group interview is often times interchangeably used as a small group interview, a focused interview, and a group depth interview (Kruger, 1988).

Brotherson (1994) argued that a focus group interview is compatible with the key assumptions of a qualitative research paradigm. In the qualitative research tradition, the *nature of reality* is viewed as phenomenological. Phenomenological reality refers to the fact that multiple views of a same reality do exist, and each different perspective on the same reality is worthy to examine to reach a fundamental finding (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Because one of the primary tenets of focus group interview is to stimulate naturalistic responses and to elicit multiple views on a topic, focus group interview is compatible with qualitative research traditions. Indeed, diverse opinions and multiple perspectives are desirable in a focus group interview (Morgan, 1998).

Data collection method

Five focus group interviews were conducted to produce more in-depth information directly came from the participants, and those five focus group interviews occurred once per week over two month periods, from December 2007 through January 2008. A debriefing session of previous focus group interview was spread over intermittently through the entire duration of following interview process. Debriefing or *member check* refers to sharing the transcription, interview memorandum, interpretation, and write-up of researcher with the participants and other member of the group to clear up areas of miscommunications (Maxwell, 1992). The first four focus group discussions were related to the proposed research questions and the final interview was the synthesis

of overall interviews through which the participants and I reviewed the results of the interviews, clarified any misunderstandings, and enunciated a concluding statement about overall interviews. Theoretically, small focus group interviews should last until the level of saturation reaches, when saturation refers to the a interview situation in which no new information emerges due to almost every issue and concern of interest has been already communicated on previous interview sessions (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). However, it was not uncommon for a single focus group interview transcript to be 40 to 60 pages in length, not including interviewer's notes and interview guide. Should there be more than five focus group interviews conducted, the amount of data that need to be transcribed, organized, and reduced to cogent thematic units quickly would have become overwhelming. Therefore, I decided to have five focused group interviews for current research. As the appendix of interview transcriptions indicated, fortunately, I thought that saturation did really occur at the final interview because there was almost no new information that emerged.

The focus group interview method was selected because the focus group interview method demonstrates five advantages over an individual one-on-one interview: Synergism, snowballing, stimulation, security, and spontaneity (Hess, 1968; Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001; Smithson, 2000). Synergism refers to a focus group interview situation when a wider range of data emerges through group interaction. A snowballing effect refers a focus group interview situation in which the statements of one respondent initiate a chain reaction of additional comments. The stimulation effect of a focus group interview is obtained when a focus group discussion generates the motivation of participants to delve into deeper and deeper about the topic under

discussion. The security effect of focus group interview refers to the effects that participants feel more relaxed and naturalistic when they participate in group discussion because they are not under the burdens of compulsory responses to each and every single probing question and statement of interviewer. Finally, the spontaneity of participants' contributions occurs because the focus group interviews do not require participants to answer every question; therefore, their responses tend to be more naturalistic, and thus more spontaneous and genuine.

Participants

This section addresses issues related to the identification and selection of participants. Recruiting appropriate participants is directly related to the accuracy and usefulness of information obtained through focus group interviews (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1993). Therefore, establishing appropriate criteria for participant selection and recruitment is one of the most important aspects of focus group interview study because all of the data are direct contributions or inputs from the selected participants. Non-probabilistic and purposeful sampling is considered as a norm in qualitative research, and purposeful sampling refers to selecting participants based on pre-determined criteria (Basch, 1987). A purposive sampling can be defined as a procedure by which researchers select a subject or participants based on predetermined criteria about the extent to which the selected participants could contribute to the research study (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996)

According to the Committee for SAT II Korean (2000), it was reported that a full range of academic Korean language classes were offered at 20 high schools across the United States of America, and the totals of about 1,400 high school students were

enrolled in Korean language classes, learning the language in preparation for SAT II in the year of 1997. In 2000, the same committee reported that there were a total of 1,860 students enrolled in 80 Korean classes at 27 high schools in the United States. In addition, there were almost 1,000 so-called weekend Korean language schools or Korean as a heritage language programs operating in the United States with a total enrollment of about 60,000 students (Lee, 2000). As the above statistics indicates, obtaining an access to a formal high school SAT II for Korean class is extremely limited because only 27 high schools across all over the United States of America have offered such classes. Therefore, I decided to choose a weekend Korean language school in Atlanta area because of its accessibility.

Participants for this study came from the *Korean-American School of Atlanta*. The school serves K-12 students. I selected six students, 4 girls and 2 boys, in grades 7th through 8th because it is recommended that there should be a minimum of six interviewees to produce meaningful data in a focus group interviews, considering dynamics of human interactions (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). I decided not to recruit high school students because I learned that high school students are hard to participate in research activity due to their busy schedules. Moreover, I thought that some high school students might be almost completely assimilated into the mainstream cultural value of American society that they would not reveal Korean ethnic specific cultural values, one of the major factors of Korean academic success. Students attending the school meet every Saturday from 9:00 a. m. through 1:30 p.m. They came from schools all over the metro-Atlanta areas, and their attendance has been steady just like a typical secondary school.

Participant recruitment was done by two tiered processes. First, one page length participant identification survey was conducted to the age appropriate whole student populations of 120 students at the Korean American School of Atlanta, and only students who responded on the identification survey in a way that satisfied the established purposeful participation criteria were recruited. The pre-established purposeful criteria included: A) be officially identified gifted student from early ages B) having maintained excellent grade point average, and C) volunteering to participate in the study. Second, only students who responded to the one page survey in a way that they were officially identified as a gifted student from very early ages were contacted by phone calls. As a result of phone conversations, only both students and their parents who were willing to participate in this study were recruited.

Because the attendance of students was consistent, I did not anticipate any dropouts from my interview groups. However, one female student dropped out from the 3rd interview session without specifying any particular reason. Respecting the participant's right that she could drop out of interview participation even after the interview had begun, I politely cajoled her to come to our interview meeting. She did not show up for our 3rd focus group interview and I notified her parent and her church youth pastor of her decision. Also, I did not recruit replacement because a new member would, I thought, negatively affect the dynamics of our group interaction or at least both the rest members of focus group and a newly recruited member might feel uncomfortable.

Data analysis method

When a researcher is interested in the language of the participants and willing to work with the data to identify the units of information that contribute to the themes or findings, a qualitative data analysis can be best informative methodology (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Since my research questions are open-ended invitations of participants' contributions and transcribed texts will be the major data sources for this study, qualitative data analysis methods are most relevant to find information that contributes to themes or topics that explain the proposed research questions. Among various qualitative data analysis strategies, I decided to use the protocols of data analysis proposed by Maxwell (1992; 1996) and Yin (1989) because this data analysis model has been reported to help a novice researcher to produce a more reliable and valid interpretation of the data.

Precise qualitative data analysis procedure occurs with most accurate and complete transcription of audiotapes or videotapes of focus group interviews. The data analysis protocol suggested by Maxwell (1992; 1996) and Yin (1989) consists of five interactive procedures. First, the researcher should identify several *big ideas* that represent the participants' overall views on the issues by examining participants' words, statements, ideas, the intensity of responses, and non-verbal communications during and immediately following interviews. In an analogy, this phase is like looking through binoculars to find whole structure and shape of a house. Second, the researcher begins to *unitize the data*. Unitizing the data refers to identify the units of information that will later become the basis for defining categories. In an analogy, this phase is like looking through a microscope to examine each individual brick that builds up a house. I marked

the information units in different colors using highlighters, and did the margin coding (Bertrand, Brown, & Ward, 1992). Margin coding refers to jot down numbers or letters on each margin of transcripts to represent each theme when themes are identified. This phase of data analysis was most time consuming. Third, the researcher sorts the identified information units through the process of compiling the *unitized data* through the second step of analysis into relevant piles that will eventually represent categories or themes. Fourth, the researcher negotiates identified categories or themes for possible conglomeration of a more general category or theme. At this stage of data analysis, I checked the validity of identified categories by going through the step I through III one more time. Fifth, the researcher reexamines the ideas generated by considering if any of the big ideas identified at the fourth step of data analysis are supported by the categories emerged by the overall data analysis procedures. In the light of the work done with the information units and categories, I reframed or restated the finalized big ideas in this stage of data analysis. Only refined themes at this stage were discussed in the light of theoretical framework or proposition stated early on (Yin, 1989).

Statement of subjectivity and control of bias

Constructivism takes an ontological and epistemological standpoint that there is no objective reality that is independent from the idiosyncratic perception, interpretation, and re-construction of perceived or conceived experiences of each individual. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggested that qualitative research community should come up with an alternative research paradigm of post-positivism, and thus suggested constructivism and critical theory as feasible alternatives. One of the fundamental premises of constructivism states that human beings are bound to be subjective unless they can step out of the human

ways of perceiving phenomenon (Von Glasersfeld, 1987). When two or more multiple subjective individuals mutually see a phenomenon in an agreeable fashion, their *intersubjectivity* shares a coherence or commonality. The coherent *intersubjectivity*, constructivists assume, should be the foundation on which human beings should build on knowledge, and the knowledge is of essence a constructed truth (Von Glasersfeld, 1987).

A potential benefit exists when a researcher and participants share much coherence, commonality, and/or intersubjectivity in qualitative research. Through the process of data collection and analysis, the researcher gains an access to the participants' world. The researcher eventually represents the participants' perceptions of their world through research reports or publications. When the researcher and the participants share much commonality such as identity, interest, and background, it may be easier for the researcher to gain access to the participants' world. Moreover, the degree to which the researcher is being able to reach an in-depth understanding of the participants' world also may well be influenced by shared social identity between the researcher and the participants. Also, the researcher can distinguish a delicate meaning of the participants' subtle verbal nuances or body gestures when they share same cultural and linguistic background.

In the present research, I shared a social identity with the participants such as race, ethnicity, culture, language, and a high intellectual ability. In the process of qualitative data collection and analysis, it proves advantageous when a researcher shares a social group identity with participants because mutually agreeable interpersonal sensitivities facilitate to elicit more fluent spontaneous narratives from participants, which is most critical in qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Therefore, I

could serve as an ideal researcher for the quest undertaken in the vein of constructivism because I shared many identities with the participants of present study including ethnicity, language, cultural value and high intellectual capacity.

However, when the identity background, social interest, and personal passion between researchers and participants are overlapped, there exist a hazard of bias and subjectivity of a researcher fused into research process and result. Sharing a common social group identity of a researcher with the participants introduces the potential bias of infusing researchers' own thoughts, feelings, and interpretations into data analysis process. Seidman (1998) noted that researchers should identify the autobiographical roots of their research interest about the topic to minimize those biases stated above. In keeping up with the warnings of researcher bias of Seidman, I have described autobiographical root of the present research in the origin of this study section in introduction chapter. In the following section, I discussed the methodological issues of researcher bias control.

In order to control potential bias, I have actively utilized a *debriefing* method. Also, I have arduously *member-checked* any interpretations that I made, and *triangulated* data from participants in accordance with qualitative research tradition. A debriefing method refers to the meeting between the researcher and the participants that follows focus group interviews to review data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions to verify that the researcher has constructed an adequate representation and interpretations of the participants' experiences (Edmunds, 1999). Member checks refer to provide the opportunities for participants to check whether the interpretations and write-ups of researcher are accurate and consistent with participants' intentions (Creswell, 2005). Data triangulation refers to obtain multiple sources of data to check and ensure if

the findings from one data are supported by second or third data as well (Moran-Ellis, et. al., 2006). Data triangulation has been done to validate the findings by collecting and analyzing data from focus group interview, participant observation memorandum, and reflection journal during entire period of focus group interview.

Ethical issues of current study

Considering the ethical guidelines of several professional organizations in education and psychology such as Council for Exceptional Children and American Psychological Association, Edmunds (1999) recommended that researchers should treat children and adolescents with the same respect and understanding, as they would do to adults. The researchers must obtain the letter of participation consent from both children and their parents/guardians when age minors are involved in research. When participants are minors in age, the researchers should be even more cautious with ethical issues. For example, when students are removed from small group interview session due to poor performances and/or disruptive behaviors, this could contribute to intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. Moreover, the conflicts could linger far beyond the end of the research project, and could well extend to the child's early adult life (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Therefore, the researchers should respect the beliefs, wishes, and rights of prospective participants regardless of their ages. The participants' rights include refusing to participation even after interviews began. I had been a teacher at the very data collection site, and I had not expected any participant drop-out would occur. When the participation conflict really occurred in my research, I was planned and prepared with the unexpected drop-out, and I abided the guidelines discussed above.

Seidman (1998) noted that interviewing relationship between the participants and the researcher is inundated with issues of power resulting from factors such as intelligence, status, education, age, race, class, and gender. Therefore, the researcher should be cognizant with potential misuse of relationship power to participants in prior to, during, and after interviews. This is especially pertinent when the minors of age are involved in research. In keeping up with the precautions of Seidman (1998) and Edmund (1999), I planned and addressed pertinent issues in a way that follows. I secured written permission from both participants and their parents of all audio-recording occurred. Also, I provided the participants with the purpose of research in a manner and language that they could clearly understand in both English and Korean. During the entire focus group interviews, I ensure that no participants were forced to respond, or being expected to answer in a researcher pleasing manner, or being humiliated for having different opinions. I also provided the participants with an honest explanation about how the research results will be used, and how their confidentiality will be secured. Overall, I tried to be most articulate and cautious in order not to influence the participants' opinions, beliefs, and ideas to align with my research purpose.

Trustworthiness and rigor of research

Because the trustworthiness, the validity, or the rigor of research is of imperative component to judge the quality of a study, scholars have sought to define what makes good, valid, and trustworthy qualitative research for a long time (Morse, Mayan, Olsen, & Spiers, 2002; Creswell, 2005). However, research community is not near to consensus or even to deciding whether it is appropriate to have a universal standard to judge research rigor, study trustworthiness, or validity of research findings in qualitative

research traditions (Creswell, 2005; Rolfe, 2006). The current status of research validity is well summarized in “*the use of reliability and validity are common in quantitative research and now it is reconsidered in the qualitative research paradigm*” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 597). Having current status of research rigor or trustworthiness in qualitative research tradition stated, the purpose of this section is to discuss the validity of the present focus group study.

Some researchers proposed a positivistic approach as a solution, such that “*there is nothing to be gained from use of alternative terms, which, on analysis, often proved to be identical to the traditional terms of reliability and validity*” (Long & Johnson, 2002, p. 30). On the contrary, some qualitative researchers contend that the basic assumptions of qualitative and quantitative research are incompatible and that the concept of validity and reliability in qualitative research should be abolished (Smith, 1984; Creswell, 2005). Since “*all kinds of experiences [of an individual] are essentially subjective,*” every human experience is idiosyncratic in nature (von Glaserfeld, 1995, p. 1). Due to the idiosyncratic and subjective nature of human experiences, “*some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research*” for a measure of quality check (Golafshani, 2003, p. 602). Or at least, “*qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry*”, and qualitative research needs a different type of measure for quality check (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). Logically, therefore, the research rigor or validity of the present study should be located somewhere in-between the above two extreme viewpoints.

The difference in the purposes of evaluating the quality of qualitative studies is so different from quantitative studies that the concept of reliability is not only irrelevant but

even misleading in qualitative research (Stenbacka, 2001). If a qualitative study is discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence is that “*the study is no good*” (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 552). On the other hand, Patton (2001) states that validity and reliability are two factors that any quality research, regardless of its research-paradigm, should concern in its designing the study, analysis the result, and judging the trustworthiness. According to Johnson & Christensen (2004), a valid qualitative study is a plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore defensible research. Because the epistemological scope of qualitative methodologies is simply too broad to be represented by any single set of criteria, Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) advocated that qualitative research validity should be judged according to aesthetic and rhetorical criteria with dependable ‘super’ *audit trails*. The dependable super audit trail refers to a researcher to leave for readers and fellow researchers with recounting not only the rationale underpinning the research decisions had made and actual course of research process, but also providing with ongoing self-critique and self appraisal including the moral, social and political stance of researchers themselves (Koch & Harrington, 1998; Creswell, 2005). Therefore, a high quality qualitative study with validity and rigor is a research report of which demonstrates aesthetic beauties, persuasive and logical rhetoric, and super audit trails. Moreover, making available the audit trails of a study can be dealt with comparative objectivity, and thus I decided to focus on the issues of availability of audit trails.

In the vein of super audit trail, for instance, a group of qualitative researchers argued that the validity and rigor of qualitative research is achieved when “*another trained researcher could analyze the same data in the same way and come to essentially*

the same conclusion” (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 110). Some scholars advocate a rigid method of data analysis which promises the production of relatively objective and grounded theories, grounded in collected data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that reliability and validity are the “*usual cannons of good science*’ and establishing quality studies can not be accomplished without the so-called cannons of good science (p. 250). In the mean time, Denzin and Lincoln propose that the ideas, information units, and refined themes should be constantly crosschecked in terms of pre-established research questions, following data analysis protocols to produce trustworthy studies (2000). Overall, many seasoned qualitative researchers encourage neophyte researchers to emerge fully in those methods of relative objective data analysis before undertaking a full pledged constructivist data analysis method (Creswell, 2005), and I agreed with this relatively objective data analysis model.

Regardless of position a qualitative researcher takes on, however, it is important to think about the issue of validity and rigor in qualitative studies to produce quality research. There have been some established strategies to maximize the validity of qualitative research. *Researcher bias* is one potential threat to validity that researchers must be careful to watch out. Researcher bias refers to the problem that qualitative researchers are easy to find out what they want to see, and their research publication is easy to be about what they want to speak out (Munday, 2006). Researcher bias occurs when a qualitative researcher allows his/her personal views and perspectives to affect how data are interpreted and how the research is conducted (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Researcher bias is better controlled in a manner that the researcher actively engages in critical self-reflection about his or her potential biases and predisposition

(Chiu & Knight, 1999). In order to conduct, therefore, a rigorous and unbiased research I utilized a constant self-critiquing of potential bias and a continuous cross-checking of data if the data were consistent with the original intentions of participants in this study.

Also, the validity of qualitative research can be judged in terms of soundness of data interpretation. Interpretive validity refers to accurately portraying the meaning expressed by participants to what is being studied by the researcher (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Interpretive validity is enhanced when *member checks* are actively utilized. Member checks refer to sharing the interpretations and write up of a researcher with the participants and other members of the group to clear up areas of miscommunications (Maxwell, 1992). Also, *low-inference descriptors* are helpful to achieve a rigorous qualitative research report. Low-inference descriptors refer to description that is phrased very similarly to the participants' accounts and the researchers' field notes, through which the reader can experience the actual language, dialect, and personal meanings of participants (Maxwell, 1996). In keeping up with aforementioned qualitative research tradition, I have diligently member checked my write-up and interpretation with the participants, and tried to use low-inference descriptors whenever possible in this study.

Moreover, a cautious and well-trained researcher should be able to heed the delicate and minor details in order to produce rigorous and valid qualitative research (Hakim, 2000). During focus group interviews, interviewer (researcher) should keep extensive notes on verbal and nonverbal responses of participants to the key issues (Merton, 1987). The researcher should pay a particular attention on the participants' emotional statements such as sarcasm, anger, passion, and joy (Morgan, 1988). However,

I learned that it was extremely difficult for me to take notes during focus group interview and ask interview questions and listen to their responses at the same time. For this vein, all I can say is that I did my best. After the focus group interviews, however, I safeguarded the validity of my interpretations about participants' responses through member checks and debriefing sessions with almost religious sincerity.

In conclusion, in order to conduct a more rigorous focus group study, I triangulated to secure better quality of research data. Data triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources in a single study, by collecting data at different times, different places, with different people. Each different data source may provide additional reasons and perspectives on the research questions undertaken, resulting in a more complete understanding of the phenomenon (Stake, 1997). The data obtained by triangulation include the transcribed texts of focus group interviews, observation memorandum, and my research reflection journal. I examined my own possible researcher bias in the section of origin of this study in an autobiographical manner to enhance the validity of the present study. The audit trails of current research are attached in Appendices. Finally, the validity of this study may be better bolstered by systematic utilization of continuous member checks and debriefing sessions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter delineated the theoretical framework of human agent perspective of students-based inquiry within the paradigm of constructivism. The rationale of choosing the above particular theoretical framework of study was explained because the chosen theoretical framework guided me as to how I conducted current study and the way I

wrote this research report. Because I aimed to elucidate the extraordinary academic achievement and school success of Korean American gifted students to the depth of why and how this phenomenon occurs, not just how often or how much compared to other traditional ethnic minority children in the United States of America, the naturalistic and open-ended focus group interview method was chosen because this research method seemed to most adequately accomplish the study purpose of current research. In order to satisfy the research rigor and scholarly standard of qualitative research tradition, the characteristics of qualitative research design and the rationale for using the focus small group interview method, data collection method, participant selection, data analysis method, statement of subjectivity and control of bias, pertinent ethical issue, and validity and reliability of current research was articulated, respectively in order in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter is organized into two major sections with a brief introduction and a summary. First, I will present narrative portraits of the participants in keeping with the qualitative research tradition, in which the foremost attention is given to the participants themselves, and thus the knowledge produced by this research is grounded in their contributions. Through the portraits, the readers of this paper have an opportunity to meet the students. The participants in the present study were purposefully selected from the student body of the Korean American School of Atlanta, and the most significant commonality the participants share is that they were all officially identified as gifted students in their public schools at an early age. Also, they are all extraordinary academic achievers and have maintained their Korean ethnic heritage by learning Korean language and culture. In this study, “*extraordinary academic achiever*” refers to the students who have maintained an excellent grade point average, and have been recognized for their academic merits at the school-district or at least the school-wide level in such events as academic bowls, book battles, spelling bees, Math Decathlon, science fairs, etc.

Second, the emerged personality and contextual factors that influence the academic success of the participants are presented, and these factors are determined through data analysis, using the protocol proposed by Maxwell (1992; 1996) and Yin (1989). Throughout this chapter, the so-called *low inference descriptors* are used

whenever appropriate so that the readers of this paper can experience the actual language, dialect, and personal meanings of participants. The low inference descriptor refers to the use of description phrased very close to the participants' actual accounts and verbatim (i.e., direct quotation) is a commonly used type of low inference descriptor (Creswell, 2005). Even though this chapter represents my interpretation and synthesis of the collected data, the traditions of academic qualitative research have been meticulously pursued in order to secure the research rigor and the trustworthiness of the findings. This section is followed by the narrative portraits of participants and a summary table 1 with demographic and academic information on the participants. Next follow the six major personality factors that have facilitated the extraordinary academic success of the participants. Finally, two additional contextual factors are presented with a very short chapter summary.

Narrative Portraits of Participants

John: I don't really like math, but I don't know why I'm good at it

Standing tall and speaking in a deep voice, John defies the stereotype that Asians are relatively small. However, the manner in which he carries himself fits into the nerdy Asian stereotype almost prototypically. He arrives early or on time to every focus meeting. He presents himself like a seasoned soldier who speaks only out of absolute necessity but with a convincing voice and manner. He always wears dark blue pants with a white dress shirt, exuding the impression that he is wearing a school uniform of some highly exclusive private institute. Even though he is from a quite well-to-do family background, he has never been in such an exclusive private school. Perhaps, his mental

reference group might be elite private school students, and this identity might be reflected in his choice of clothing. His father is a pathologist working for a hospital in downtown Atlanta, and his mother is an insurance agent of a nationally competitive corporate company.

My name is John. I go to---Middle School in --- County. I'm in the seventh grade and... I don't really like math... but I don't know why I'm good at it. I like science the best because you get to do like... activities...like labs and like...dissecting things. And our teacher really pushes us and gives us challenges.

Kevin: I'm like a light bulb. You flick on the light and you're like lightning

With glasses on his fair-skinned face and his agile body frame, Kevin's physique resembles that of a young medical doctor who has been exercising enthusiastically for his entire life. At one point, another female student in the focus group stated "*wow you just look like a Korean version of Harry Potter*" describing his physique and appearance. However, the resemblance stops at appearance, and Kevin is much more humorous than the serious fictional character. With his bright smile and jaunty attitude, Kevin attracts people easily, and accordingly everybody is his friend. He is nick-named *Mr. Extraordinary* because his teachers have often complimented him with that adjective. He is bright like a light bulb, especially with questions involving high order thinking. To questions of memory, he responds with such a wit that people are lost in laughter without thinking whether Kevin's comments are meant to be an answer or a joke. He is extremely agile even though he is not tall or muscular. He slyly makes a point about his agility and athleticism in his statement that he is thinking of being a professional skateboarder. Once he made every spectator hold their breath with his skateboarding stunts during one focus

group interview session. Due to his natural confidence, he seems like he would be the last person to become jealous. Interestingly though, he seems to taunt his own younger brother by one year on several occasions during the interviews. He often compares himself with his brother; but it has not been observed that he ever compared himself with any other individuals.

My name is Kevin and I'm in seventh grade and I go to --- Middle School in ---County. My favorite class is science and my mom tells me that I have to be good at math. They say I'm like...uh...uh...really...smart. Like, I'm like a – a – light bulb. Like, you flick on the light and you're like...lightning, I guess? Well, I do my homework...on the [school] bus. Yeah, and then when I get home, no homework, all play!

Aimee: I got into gifted when I was in ...first grade and my favorite subject is...math

With her delicate features, thin frame, and long legs, Aimee looks like a teen-aged fashion model. Wearing blue jeans with an almost religious consistency, she is limited to her choice of shirt to make her fashion statement. Even though she is not preoccupied with her appearance like some typical teen-aged girls, she looks very trendy and exudes a holistic and natural beauty. Her hearty teen-age laughter shows orthodontic braces. Also, she said that she began to wear a pair of contact lens very recently, and she said that she had worn a pair of eye glasses as long as she could remember. She is a very talented in language; she has been a continuous spelling bee champion for county-wide competitions ever since she was in fourth grade, and has published some poems in children's literature magazines. She speaks so naturally and comfortably without any big vocabulary words,

people may be surprised if they learned for the first time that she has accomplished extraordinary feats with her language talents. For instance, she was invited to participate in a Duke University summer gifted program because she scored very high on her PSAT that she took in the later part of her 7th grade. Without boasting of her advanced language skills and achievements, she shows her unbending passion for math.

I'm Aimee, I'm in eighth grade at --- Middle School in --- County. My favorite class is...hmm...actually... math. I like it the best because...it's...solid. Like, there's an explanation for everything. For instance, in social studies and science, it could be 'this', it could be 'that'. But math... it all adds up. It makes... sense. Only one answer can be right and then everything else is wrong.

Hannah: you actually need education to provide for yourself with whatever you want and stuff...

Her big candid eyes would have left a more lingering impression if her constant enthusiastic talking had not taken away the attention of listeners. Her olive-tone face is framed by dark brown hair, swinging freely above her shoulders. Hannah is seen daily dressed in jeans and flip-flops with no socks even during the winter season of our interview. She appears to comfortably handle multi-tasks because she talks, laughs, and listens all at the same time. Although she is fast and exuberant talker and sometimes she does not quite wait the turn to speak, her contributions to the focus group discussions were significant and very pertinent to the topics. She has played violin for her county youth symphony, and has committed herself to her school's track and field team. Hannah is a born pragmatist and performer. Her pragmatism is well summarized by the statement,

“if you are going to have to do it later anyways, so why not do it right then and there ... and if you do it, why not do the best you can.”

*My name’s Hannah, I’m in eighth grade, I go to school in --- Middle, and...I guess...my favorite subject is...math. ... Education is important... If you don’t go to school...you’re still going to grow up and you can’t live with your parents forever... I mean, who would want to live with their parents forever? Like, I’m saying, if you want to grow up and actually be able to provide for yourself... to like have like... whatever you want and stuff..., uhmm, **you actually need education.** Unless you have like a special talent, which, like, people usually don’t have...*

Grace: I like all of my classes except for P.E.

Grace is seen daily with her dark brown, almost black, hair pulled back into a simple ponytail, dressed in jeans and tennis shoes. With clean eyes behind metal framed glasses and pale skin, she is not anxious about her appearance, unlike most teenage girls of her age. She is introverted, reflective, and always has a book in her hands. She does not have spare time because she either commits herself to a certain purposeful activity such as drawing, using the computer, or reading the Bible or some serious materials or reads what she has carried along for fun. She does not like to draw attention to herself, and speaks a just the right amount. She is so spiritual and ideology-driven that sometimes she looks aloof, not participating in discussions that strike her as materialistic and mundane. She has all A’s and only one B in her entire school life, and she has participated in all sorts of gifted programs and advanced or accelerated classes, ever since she was identified as gifted in the first grade.

Table1.

Information of the Research Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Gifted identification	Achievements
John	M	13	3 rd grade	play violin for city youth symphony; Tae-Kwon-Do 2 nd degree black belt; all A's and very occasional B; 2 nd place in a school district –wide science fair; varsity competition swimming; fluent in English and Korean, and conversant in Spanish
Kevin	M	13	4 th grade	play piano; stunt skateboarding; Gum-Do 1 st degree black belt; All A's and occasional B; simultaneous bilingual in English and Korean
Aimee	F	13	1 st grade	play piano in advance level and play cello for school orchestra; PSAT at 7 th grade; DUKE summer gifted summer program; published poems; 4 time consecutive spelling bee champion in a county level; 2 nd and 3 rd place in county-wide science fair at 7 th and 8 th grade; varsity soccer player; swimming as a seasonal sports; all A's in every school subject without a single B; Tae-Kwon-Do 1 st degree back belt and 2 nd place in a form completion in metro Atlanta areas; fluent in English and Korean, and has learned Spanish for 3 years
Hannah	F	13	2 nd grade	play violin for county youth symphony; all A's in every school subject; varsity field and track; soccer youth referee; simultaneous bilingual in English and Korean, and has learned Spanish including private tutoring
Grace	F	12	1 st grade	play piano for city youth symphony; all A's in every school subject; fluent in English and Korean, and has learned Spanish for 4 years

I'm Grace and I'm in seventh grade and I go to --- Middle School and... I don't really have one favorite class. I like almost all of my classes, except for P.E. Well, I'm in advanced [classes now] and next semester I'll be in accelerated [classes]. And even in those gifted classes, people always copy off of me and stuff whenever we have a project or something.

Emerg ed Personality Factors Affecting the

Academic Performance of the Gifted Korean American Students

Ormrod (1995) reported that human beings process information in units, and the capacity of each information unit is known to be seven plus or minus two (7 ± 2); therefore, most of the information that we use in our daily life happens to be from five to nine digits or each information unit has five to seven substructures of information. Considering the academic success of the gifted Korean American students as an information unit, I thought it is the best to present the most prominent seven emerg ed factors that have affected the academic performance of the participants of this study. For this reason, I decided to present the six most prominent personality factors in the following section. The remaining two contextual factors will be discussed in the additional findings section.

Studiosness: The amount of time the participants actually put into study is overwhelming

The most prominent category that emerg ed in the data analysis was studiosness, i.e., how diligently each participant puts his/her efforts into actual study time. The gifted Korean American students have always been outstanding academic achievers, but they

never cease to study more and harder than average students. As indicated in Table 2, their daily life revolves around studying academic subjects and the cultivation of talents with astounding intensity.

Table 2.

Typical Daily schedule of the Participants

Days	John	Kevin	Aimee	Hannah	Grace
Sunday	Hak-Won; church; study	church	church	church; violin practice; orchestra	church
Monday	Hak-Won; Tae-Kwon- Do lesson	Piano practice; skateboarding; Gum-Do lesson	Tae-Kwon- Do lesson	violin lesson	Bridge (math) club; piano lesson
Tuesday	Hak-Won	Piano practice; skateboarding; Gum-Do lesson	Dance lesson; orchestra; academic math bowl	soccer practice	Bridge (math) club
Wednesday	Hak-Won; Tae-Kwon- Do lesson	Piano practice skateboarding; church; Gum- Do lesson	Tae-Kwon- Do lesson	church youth group	Bridge (math) club
Thursday	Hak-Won	Piano practice; skateboarding; Gum-Do lesson	Piano lesson	Track & field every day during season	Honor club
Friday	Tae-Kwon- Do lesson	Piano practice; skateboarding; church	Academic bowl; Tae- Won-Do demonstration team		Reading bowl; church
Saturday	Korean School; violin lesson; orchestra	Korean School; piano lesson	Korean School; math tutoring	Korean School; Math tutoring	Korean School

Hannah: Mondays through Fridays, I like, go to school...Mondays, after school, I have violin for an hour...Tuesday...I usually do something Tuesday...[mumbles] but I don't know... Wednesday and Sunday I go to church...Thursdays... Oh yeah! Also on Saturday I have math tutoring [for an hour and half]. On weekends, I just stay at home and don't really go anywhere, and I'll probably wake up at nine or ten or something and probably play with my brother or something or hang out with friends or something. But, like, I still do violin and like, if I have homework, I'll do it. Oh yeah! I also have orchestra on Sunday. I play for ---- Youth Symphony. ... Yeah, I read too, [whenever time permits]. And, I have track when it's track season. And when I do have track, I have it every day.

John: I go to Hak-won [private tutoring/studying institutes] and then I go to Tae-kwon-do (on) Monday, Wednesdays, [and] Fridays. I have Tae-kwon-do right after school. And then, Monday through Thursday we have...Hak-won [private after-school tutoring/studying]. Like I just study for math stuff and they help me with my homework and they try to make me go higher. On Saturday, I come to Korean school until noon and then I come home, I play until like three or four, and then I go to violin lessons and then I go to orchestra. I play for ---- orchestra. On Sundays I have church and usually I study. For breaks, in the morning I wake up at nine and just do whatever I want. And then I go to my parents' office and help out there. But sometimes we still go to Hak-won.

Aimee: On Monday, I either have Tae-kwon-do or I'm free. On Tuesdays, I have dance and orchestra. Wednesday, I have Tae-kwon-do, and Thursday I have piano. Also, Tuesday I have Math Counts [Academic Math Bowl] and Friday I have Academic Bowl [typical academic bowl including every school subject] and Tae-kwon-do Demo Team.

On Saturday, I have math tutoring and if I have homework, I'll do homework. And then on Sunday I have church. My holiday schedule is like I do Korean [language] study or math. And then sometimes [during holidays and breaks] I still go to math tutoring and I read. Oh yeah, I have soccer, but only when it's like [a] soccer season.

Kevin: I go to school...and every day after school, I go outside and skateboard. And then after that I might do piano practice. If it's Wednesday I go to church...Friday, I go to church. Then, mostly, during the normal days, I do skateboarding and then piano practice and then I go to sleep. And I do Gum-do [Korean Martial Arts of sword fighting] every day. And I have piano lessons on Saturday. My weekend? On Saturday I have piano, and then Sunday I have church. My holiday schedule, I usually skateboard. Piano, I have to practice every day...but I don't. It's just because I'm too lazy to practice. ...Gum-do... I do it usually [even during holidays and breaks] when they're open, because some holidays, they're closed.

Grace: Well, like, I have morning clubs so I have Bridge [a card game], Monday and Wednesday mornings, and Tuesday afternoons. And, I have...on Thursday ... Honor Club, and on Friday, Reading Bowl. On Monday afternoon, I go to piano and on...Friday afternoon, I go to church. On weekends, Saturday, I go to my parents' store and help them, and then the other half of the day I go to the --- County library there and read and take notes. I just do it [reading and taking note] because I want to [not as a homework or project]. My break schedule depends on how long it is. If I have a month break, like summer or winter break, the week before school starts, I usually get ready for school and like do everything. But usually I just go to my parents' store and help them there or read and think there.

It is evident that every participant has a very demanding daily schedule, and they know that the actual amount of time they study helps them to excel in their academic performance. It is also found that once they commit themselves to a certain endeavor, be it a skateboarding, an academic subject, or a pleasure-reading, they are stubborn to accomplish it at a perfect level. Actually, this thematic unit of diligence is a result of a conglomeration of commitment, tenacity, and perfectionism.

Strong sense of bilingual and bi-cultural identity: maintaining ethnic heritage including language and traditions

Surprisingly, even these extraordinary gifted achievers have sometimes experienced ethnic prejudice and ignorance from their peers at public schools. They interpreted those unpleasant experiences as personal insults, not necessarily a systematic ethnic prejudice and discrimination. Perhaps those unpleasant experiences and consequent reflections combined with their heightened intellectual ability have shaped them to develop a strong identity of who they are, *Americans with Korean heritage*. The participants of the current study demonstrate a well-developed and sophisticated bilingual and bi-cultural identity, and they feel their bilingual and bi-cultural ability helps them to excel in academic subjects. I used the term *identity* because they feel comfortable being themselves and inheriting their ethnic language and traditions. Considering the passion and dedication they have for their language and tradition, it is an essential part of themselves, which is an identity. They have intentionally spoken to their younger siblings in Korean. Moreover, they know what their likes and dislikes are as well as their strengths and weaknesses.

John: I like Science the best, but I am good at math. ... For me [about language use], 70% English and 30% Korean when I speak to my parents and I speak 100% Korean to my grand parents. Well, I can read and write [in Korean]. I learned to speak [Korean] by just talking to my parents, and I learned to write and read from a Korean school in Atlanta when I was in kindergarten. And I'm still doing it and only have about 2-3 years before I graduate. I have a lot of Korean friends who speak in Korean. Korean isn't that bad if I try, my English is great and so much more better and Korean is ok if I'm in the mood.

*Kevin: I am smart, I think I am extraordinary, ha-ha.... When I got into middle school, I started getting...serious? Umm... [About my language use]... My mom and dad, 50-50 [with Korean and English], and grandparents 100% [with Korean]. It [learning Korean] started how I learned how to say it. My mom taught me at home when I was little. And writing I started in Korean School in 2002 or 2003. When I visited Korea, and there I can feel like **I can do anything**. **Like people in restaurants think that I've always been in Korea.***

Aimee: Oh my gosh, people think I'm Chinese all the time! It's annoying when people assume that you are Chinese. People like never call me Korean. They always think I'm like Chinese or Japanese or something. They're like [imitates mocking deep voice] 'duurrr, What's Korean??? Uh huh huhhh' ... Like, about treatment, some students don't like you. Like, other gifted students want to compete with you, and then, like...lower students...they don't...like...like you... But if you're like... socially...active, then they'll just be like 'Ah, you're gifted, whatever, let's go...watch a movie.' ... [About language use] For my

grandparents like 100% Korean. And for Katie and Sean [younger siblings] 60% English and 40% Korean. I went to Korean school to learn the basics of writing and reading, um, but speaking, you sorta just have that in you if you are Korean. My mom makes me do Korean and I don't really think of it as a chore for me, and sometimes it's fun. And when I'm talking to adults I just say what I know is right... [About English ability] I would say I'm better than some Americans in English in vocab and grammar but some Americans use words that aren't vocab words. They're like something I don't know kind of like slang.

Hannah: Yeah, like they're all like "NERD!" or something... But like, it depends on like the students. Because, there are all these cliques, you know? Once you have your own clique, you're OK... [About language use] Like 30%, 40, 50% Korean for my parents, and well for my brother it's like 50-50 English Korean.... English-wise I'm more confident than most Americans. [However] usually American people focus on slang and stuff.

Grace: I'm in gifted. I like all of my classes except for P.E. Like, my friends, they have such high expectations of me. My friends ask me for answers. Like, when we have to work with partners, all of them will be like 'I'll work with Grace!' and they'll be like fighting over to work with me and stuff... Um [about language use]... for my mom and dad 64% English and 36% for Korean, and 100% Korean for my grandparents... Um [about English ability] English it depends on who you compare with, I think I'm better than them [English monolingual students] in English cuz I have a larger vocabulary.

The commonality found on the above quotes is that all of the participants have a bilingual and bi-cultural identity. Also most of them consider their English ability better than that of typical English monolingual peers. Interestingly, some of the participants have used their enhanced academic ability in social domains such as making friends as well. Particularly, one participant who visited Korea stated that his Korean was so fluent that people in Korea thought that he had been always in Korea.

Pragmatism: keen sense of the tangency between current actions and future goals

One consistent factor that repeatedly emerged throughout the focus group data was the pragmatism that the participants have maintained. The term *pragmatic* refers to having a heightened and realistic sense of the interactive relationship between one's current actions and future goals. The participants have demonstrated a practical, matter-of-fact way of approaching or assessing situations or decision-making.

*Hannah: I mean, if you don't go to school...you're still going to grow up and you can't live with your parents forever... I mean, who would want to live with their parents forever? Like, I'm saying, if you want to grow up and actually be able to provide for yourself to like have like whatever you want and stuff, you actually need education. Unless you have like a special talent, which, like, people usually don't have... Like, if you can like, do an instrument really well, or sing very well or something. But even with that, it might not help you very well, so it's still better to get an education... **if you are going to have to do it later anyways** [going to school or getting educated], **so why not do it right then and there ... and if you do it, why not do the best you can.**".... [About her language ability]*

Speaking more than one language will help you get a job, say for instance, you are in a job interview and they ask you where you are from and you say that you are from Korea they will probably ask you to speak Korean and you will have to say it.

Aimee: They ban homework in certain states because studies showed that kids who didn't have homework had better test grades. But, I mean, when you're gifted, you actually get a lot more work. And like, people really don't like that, I guess... I think that since we already go to school, I think we shouldn't have homework. Unless it's like math, which is like practice. But like the pointless things that like don't really help and stuff... [About her language ability] Also to learn languages is easier because a lot of English words are based on Spanish.

John: Well, um, like, when I got in advanced math, I wanted to try harder because I didn't want to be the low side of the math class. So I tried harder, and I got better. I got even better grades than I had in my normal math class.... [About language ability] After I learning Korean, I have a lot of Korean friends who speak in Korean. And I think I have a better chance to get a job or going to college for education..... [About future dreams] They [parents] wanted me to be a pastor and like something like a missionary. I don't really...hate the idea...like a missionary, you can go places and help out and stuff. But the pastor part...I don't want to sit at a desk all day and read the Bible all the time and write sermons all day or something. Like, I'm not saying I don't like the Bible, it's just that...it's all too serious? You know? Like, maybe a youth pastor would be pretty fun, because you go places and retreats and stuff. If I was like, a pastor- pastor

*then like the committee members could complain against me and like there would be so much pressure because the church, almost, depends all on you.... [Why he is successful with academic performance] I think it's like...well, my dad says it's like because God's with me and my mom says so too. But I think it's **because of my effort and stuff.***

*Kevin: [About his academic success] I think it's...intelligence, being Korean... Well, like, when I go to school, and then I go to my regular classes and get like a really high grade, higher than anyone else in my class, then they'll be like 'Oh my gosh, Asians are really smart.' And sometimes I like it, sometimes I don't, because you know it can be like mean and stuff.... When I visited Korea, and there, **I feel like I can do anything. Like people in restaurants think that you've always been in Korea.***

*Grace: Well...uh...I think my parents want for me to be like...a college professor or like...a dean. [Interrupted by a question, what's a dean?] [Short pause] A dean is like a principal at school, like if your teachers are professors then a dean is like a principal.... [About her academic success] Uh...um...well, **when I was smaller, I liked to read a lot, so I got a bigger vocabulary. So I got high grades on the CRCT for Reading Comprehension. And so effort and just growing up in my family. Like, my mom and dad, they help me. And when I was little, they taught me and like read to me.***

Besides English and Korean, every participant in the current study has actively learned a third language, with the understanding that it is easier for them to add on one more language due to the synergism effect, which refers to the effect that structural

knowledge acquired by learning a second language facilitates learning a third language. Aimee, Kevin, and Hannah have learned Spanish in addition to English and Korean. John and Grace have ambitiously learned not just Spanish but also French from a very early age, besides English and Korean. It is evident throughout the focus group interviews that they have learned languages with a very practical reason in their minds. They know that the fruition of their future goals depends on their current actions.

Enhanced perspective-taking ability: cognitively and socially being able to put themselves into others' shoes

The participants truly understand the behaviors of others by putting themselves in others' shoes cognitively and socially. They are able to take the perspective of the question poser, whether a teacher, an interviewer, or a peer so that they provide answers to the posed question in a succinct and poignant fashion. In the social domain, they have maintained an exceptionally respecting, trusting, and sympathetic relationship with their parents, not because their parents are perfect or faultless but because they are able to see things from their parents' point of view.

Aimee: You have to look at the parents view cuz like parents have to go through hard things too. I think that our parents had it a little harsher cuz like we are in America, a different environment. So I wish he [father]'d be more...patient. Same goes for me, I wish I could be more patient too, because I also have a temper. Maybe like next time my dad yells at me, I should just be like 'chill' and wait it out, But like, if it doesn't change, I'd still be okay. But if it did change, I'd like it.... [About friends] Like you have to know the difference between friends and users. Like, some people use you and some people are really

your friends. Like other kids who like to talk about you and stuff...they like, they'll come to you and be like "Did you do the homework last night?" And then you'd be like "Yeah." And then they'd be like "Can I copy off of you?" And like, I really hate that. Like, they take advantage of you, even if they're being mean...to you. Like, there's this guy named Brian and we used to go to elementary school together...and in elementary school we never really got along...and like, now, he's in my class, and he keeps trying to take advantage of me and stuff....

*Kevin: **I like science the best, because of the E.Q.** [Essential Question, a question that facilitates students' higher order thinking skill].... [About teachers who do not challenge students] *and like she [my teacher] doesn't even care. Like, there are those types of teachers that teach because they really want to teach. And then there're teachers that just teach because they want to make money.**

*Hannah: I like my teachers.... Like, there's a kid in our school who's like seems really smart, but all he does is study. And he's like...uh...he's just gifted because he studies. Like, what I mean is like even if you're like really smart and study a lot, doesn't mean you should be like, automatically gifted. Like, because, **you should think.** Like, I'll do my homework and stuff but I think, **I can think of answers to hard question like E. Q** and stuff.*

*John: I like science because you get to do like, activities. Like labs and like...dissecting things. And **our teacher really pushes us and gives us challenges.** [About parents] **My dad's accent, that's not really a problem,** because almost all Koreans, like basically all Koreans, in my dad's generation*

have an accent. My mom doesn't really have an accent, it's just that she doesn't have a big vocabulary.

The participants respect, love, and understand their parents not because their parents are always right or treat them respectfully, but because they can see things from their parents' point of view. Also, they respect the teachers who challenge them with questions requiring a higher order thinking skill. Overall, the perspective-taking ability appears to play a significant role for the participants of the current study to succeed in academic performance.

Spirituality (religiosity): ideology and internal values help them to overcome material barriers

The participants are idealists who describe themselves as having an obligation to cultivate their God-endowed potential to its limit to make a difference in the world. The desire to actualize their potential to make this world a better place is a central component of their constructed self-identity. Their altruistic concerns for others and bigger causes are evident in that none of the participants is a hedonist. They do not seek to satisfy egotistic self-interests, immediate contentment, or materialistic pleasure. Academic success may provide an emotional reward, but it occurs over a long period of time, in painstakingly gradual degrees. Therefore, their spirituality and altruism appear to be an indispensable component of the factors that affect their extraordinary achievements.

John: On Sundays I have church and usually I study the Bible before church... They [my parents] wanted me to be a pastor and like something like a missionary. I don't really...hate the idea. ... Like a missionary, you can go places and help out and stuff. Like, maybe a youth pastor would be pretty fun, because

*you go places and retreats and stuff. **I want to be like, a – a billionaire to give money to like, kids in Africa.***

*Aimee: And then on Sunday I have church, and it is the most important thing on Sunday. Um...I...um [about future goal]...I don't really know yet...right now. Like, **I sort of want to be a missionary...and like go to Africa and help kids there. Like, go all over the world to help children in need and show them God's words and love.** But I know that, like, missionaries, can't always support themselves and their families in this world where, like everything runs on money so...yeah...I know that I may have to take up another job and stuff...*

*Kevin: **If it's Wednesday I go to church...Friday, I go to church, and then Sunday I have church...** Um well my parents work hard. They work at a laundry place and it opens at 7AM and we close at 10PM., Monday through Sunday, and that's why we go to church at all these wee hours. My dad and mom are Christian people and they **always tell me to do something worthy in God's eyes.***

*Hannah: Mine [parents] are **very dedicated Christians** and they think that academics are really important for me to [be able] to spread God's love in this world. I just want to **do something that like... be like...good...and like helpful to other people...** They [parents] want me to do something that takes a lot of education and stuff and they work really hard. And they get up at 8am and go to work at 9 a.m. and then he [father] comes home at around 9 p.m. They want me to do something...educated.*

*Grace: On Friday afternoon, I go to church. Both my parents work, my dad started working for the church, he wakes up at 4:50 am and then he goes to open the [church] door. I only see my mom in the mornings, because she wakes me up and makes breakfast and then **the whole family has like morning worship and prayer together**. And then I, like, only see my dad sometimes at night... I just know that my dad wants me to **win the Nobel Peace Prize**... [About how her faith affects her] Like, I have one friend, her dad died. And like, her mom like gave her a lot of stuff, but she doesn't like her mom. They don't get along. They have like a good house and she has her own room and good material stuff, but they don't get along. Like, she said they were okay when she was younger, but now she feels like her mom is like twenty feet behind her. Like, her mom's not with her...*

The participants are faithful to their religious beliefs, and their religious ideology or internal values help them to overcome material barriers or hardships that they might encounter. A participant expresses her value that having spirituality and familial love is better than having material possessions without those internal values.

Optimism: helps them to be resilient when they encounter hardship and failure

The participants are optimistic. Even though they are extraordinarily successful in certain areas like academic achievement, they cannot be successful in every aspect of life. When they have encountered failures, hardships, or barriers, their optimistic interpretations of the situation have helped them not to quit, and thus over the long run, to succeed in the endeavors they undertook.

*Grace: Well, I'm in advanced and **next semester I'll be in accelerated**....*

Like, one time when I was really young, my goal was to never have a B...ever.

And I...got one...and I was sad, but my mom was like ‘It’s ok’ and stuff so she understands me like that and keeps encouraging me. And my dad works really hard, and he’s always worked hard...and...he tries...to...I can’t really explain, but... if you could change the way your parents raise you, I would like to see them more often...because I don’t see them that much. But then it’s because they have to work so hard to support, provide us things necessary... Overall, I would not change anything. It’s OK.

*Hannah: Like, I’ll do my homework and stuff but I won’t study like every day. I’ll only like study when I need to... **But I am successful, actually very successful** with my grades and stuff.... **English-wise I’m more confident** than most Americans.... Well, I’ve always wanted to, like, try it. Like...an anchor...or somebody? Or like a lawyer. **I think it’s a matter of time, I mean I can make it happen....** About how I like my parents be like, well, I – I don’t know... **I don’t think I would change anything.***

*Aimee: like my mom she did suggest about being a pediatrician, but usually she just tells me to like, **wait it out**. And then my mom...she usually like...fusses over stuff. Like, I want to go to the movies with my friend or something, but I have to practice piano. Or like, I have a friend over and she makes me practice piano. I’m like “Mom! I have a guest over!” but she still makes me practice. My dad’s a little easier on that kind of stuff. But like, **if it doesn’t change...I’d still be okay**. But if it did change...I’d like it.*

*John:... Like how they understand things. Like **even if I fail, I did my best and they understand me and they’re still optimistic about it**. So, they show a lot*

of understanding, because my dad says that he failed a lot too, and his dad wasn't a really good dad to him so he doesn't want to be like that to me. He wants to be a better dad than his dad.

It is obvious that nobody can have everything that they want or wish to possess. Therefore, people simply have to compromise somewhere in-between the given situation and ultimate satisfaction. And people tend to view these compromises either one or another, with optimism or pessimism. The participants in the current study demonstrate optimism and confidence about their current situation and future. Optimistic future expectations combined with the confidence in their own ability consistently emerge throughout the focus group data.

Additional Findings: Contextual Factors Affecting the Success of the Participants

The data for the current study was collected by the focus group interview sessions, and participants not only answered the stated research questions, but produced rich additional information as well. Considering the open-ended nature of the focus group interview questions, it is expected that the collected data produce information not directly answering the pre-established research questions. However, the contextual information is so critical to understanding the reasons for the extraordinary academic performance of the participants, I decided to include two of the more prominent factors that have surfaced repeatedly. The following section presents the home environment and the values of the parents of the participants, which are critical to fully understanding the participants' academic performance.

Supportive and functioning families

Parents are functioning as immediate, constant, and always available resources when the participants need them. Most of the parents of the participants are the first generation immigrants, and they tend to have jobs that are not compatible with their educational background. For this reason, they work almost unbearable workloads from early in the morning to late at night. In the meantime, the enhanced perspective-taking ability of the participants permits them to see through to the fundamental reason for their parents' hard work, which is to provide for the monetary needs of their children. The two seemingly incongruent factors appear to produce a synergistic effect on the educational success of the participants. That is, the participants study harder to show their appreciation of their parents' hard work and the parents can keep bearing their heavy workloads and long schedules.

Aimee: ... that doesn't mean that American kids have it better off than we do. I don't really think that they [American kids] have it better, because you have to look at the parents' view because like parents have to go through hard things too and if your children aren't really doing what they are supposed to do... Yeah, like being Korean we learned a lot of traditions. We respect our parents more because I think it's in our culture.

Hannah: Well Korean kids are better behaved most of the time, and some Americans treat their adults really badly... they [parents] work really hard. And they get up at 8am and go to work at 9am and then he [father] comes home at around 9pm.

Grace: Like our parents they say that they did everything their parents told

them to do. So like I obey my parents first... Both my parents work, my dad started working for the church, he wakes up at 4:50 am and then he goes to open the [church] door. My mom goes to work at the [fast food restaurant].

Kevin: Um well my parents work hard. They work at a laundry place and it opens at 7AM and we close at 10PM. Monday through Sunday.

John: My dad he works as a pathologist in a hospital downtown and he leaves for work at 8AM and he works until 2AM.

Fostering a wide range of interests in the children: education is the first priority

The families of the participants have spent a significant portion of their family incomes on their children's education. Every participant has played at least one musical instrument from a very early age: two of them play for their county youth symphony and one for the school orchestra. Also, three of the five families have paid for private math tutoring and Hak-Won (Korean private commercial tutoring institute), and four of them have paid for Tae-Kwon-Do or Gum-do lessons as well as some seasonal sports such as soccer and swimming. Every family has made conscious investments for their children's academic success and cultivation of some special talents, regardless of the family's financial condition.

*Hannah: Mondays, after school, I have **violin** for an hour... Oh yeah! Also on Saturday I have **math tutoring** and **Korean school** [Korean School of Atlanta]. I also have **orchestra** on Sunday. I play for ---Youth Symphony. I have track when it's track season.*

*John: Monday through Thursday I have...**Hak-Won [tutoring/study]**. Like I just study for math stuff and they help me with my homework and they try to*

*make me go higher... I go to **Taekwondo**, Monday, Wednesday, Friday. On Saturday, I go to **Korean school** until noon and then I go to **violin lessons** and then I go to **orchestra**. I play for --- Orchestra.*

*Aimee: On Monday, I either have **Taekwondo** or I'm free. On Tuesdays, I have **dance, and orchestra**. Wednesday, I have Taekwondo, and Thursday I have **piano**. On Saturday, I have **math tutoring and Korean study**. Oh yeah, I have **soccer**, but only when it's like soccer season*

*Kevin: I do **Gum-do** every day. And on Saturday, I have piano lessons and **Korean study** [Korean School of Atlanta].*

*Grace: On Monday afternoon, I go to **piano lesson**... I have **Korean Study** [Korean School of Atlanta] on Saturday.*

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to illustrate the emerged factors that affect the extraordinary academic success of the participants, and the purpose was accomplished through interpretations of the narrative data. In order to ensure the validity of my interpretations, each finding is supported by actual statements made by each participant. Also, honoring the qualitative research tradition, which stipulates every finding should be grounded in the contribution of the research participants, I have constructed a narrative portrait of each participant using low inference descriptors. This chapter was presented in three major sections. First, following a brief introduction the portraits of the participants were presented. Second, major findings of this study were presented as to personality factors that affect the academic performance of the participants. Third, additional

findings were presented as to contextual factors that affect the academic success of the participants.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

I have identified six personality factors and two additional contextual factors that may affect the extraordinary academic success of the participants. These eight factors emerged from the direct contributions from the participants in response to the following questions: first, what factors do you feel contribute to your academic success? Second, what are your beliefs and attitudes about academic success, teachers, and educational system and practice in general? Third, how do you internalize your academic success and how does the internalized identity of academic achiever affect your behavior? The purpose of this chapter is to situate the findings of the present study over the existing literature of educational psychology. To accomplish the purpose, I will discuss the emerged eight factors in light of the relevant literature of educational psychology (see Table 3), present implications for the theory and practice of educating highly gifted Korean American students, and finally offer recommendations for future research with a brief summary.

Table 3.

Findings of This Study and Existing Research Literature

Findings of this study	Relevant existing literature	Compare & contrast
Studiosness	flow experiences by Csikszentmihaylyi	probably different in its magnitude but similar in its cycle
Bilingual & bi-cultural identity	Erikson's developmental theory (1963); ethnic identity formation of minority children (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992)	The participants showed mature identities at the ages of 12 to 13 while Erickson (1963) thought identity crisis is resolved by 15 to 18 year olds
Pragmatism	ability of delayed gratification and self-control (Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990)	Practical and self-regulated individual enjoys many psychological benefits.
Enhanced perspective-taking ability	highly gifted individuals' unusual needs by Geiger (1997)	The enhanced perspective-taking ability affects both cognitive and emotional domains while Geiger (1997) focused on cognitive domains.
Spirituality	Moral development theory of Kohlberg (1984)	Once gifted individual committed themselves to a social cause or to people, they commit so intensely that disownment of their commitment can be very hard.
Optimism	Theory of optimism by Kelleher & Patterson (2005)	ability to see things in a long-term view leads to optimism, and optimism leads to resiliency
Supportive & functioning families	Giftedness is the product of system, that being a family, community, historical period, and/or social ethos (Silverman, 1993).	It looks as though gifted children take gifted parents.
Education is the first priority of the participants	Multiple potentials of gifted individual (Van Tassel-bask, 1993)	Parents have consciously invested the most amounts of monetary resources for their children's education and cultivation of talents.

Discussion, Conclusions and Implications of the Findings

Studiosness: The amount of time the participants actually put into study is overwhelming

Gifted individuals are capable of superior performance, and the superior performance can be demonstrated by a variety of behaviors and in many different domains. The effort each participant has put into actual study time and cultivation of talents was consistently evident without exception. The participants have always been outstanding academic achievers, yet they never cease to study more and harder than do their typical age peers. Devoting one's life to a singular focus requires a powerful internal drive for mastery and strong task commitment (Greene, 2006). However, why and how these participants dedicate so much effort to studying and cultivating their talents with no immediate material reward is not clear, except for the vague notion that their efforts may pay off in some years down the road. In this section, I will delve into the reasons for and mechanisms of the emerged personality trait of studiosness in relation to existing educational research findings.

Both strong task commitment and powerful internal drive for mastery were evident in John's response "*I go to Hak-Won [on] Monday through Thursday and then I go to Tae-kwon-do [on] Mondays, Wednesdays, [and] Fridays. On Saturday, I come to Korean school and then I go to violin lessons and then I go to orchestra. I do it usually when they're open, because some holidays, they're closed.*" Both characteristics were evident in Grace's response as well, "*on weekends, I go to my parents' store and help them, and then the other half of the day I go to the --- county library there and read and take notes... [Interjected, "for homework?"]... No, I just do it because I want to.*" It is

obvious that John goes to Hak-Won, Taekwondo, Korean school, violin lessons, and orchestra as long as they are open, and it sounds like he would go to practice if they were open during holidays as well. Also, the response of Grace clearly indicates that she reads and studies on weekends out of her internal drive, not as a homework assignment.

The personality trait of *studiousness*, strong task commitment and internal drive for mastery, parallels the description of “*flow*” in the research of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. In his autobiographical study “*Flow: The Joy of Reading,*” Csikszentmihalyi (2000) defined the notion of flow as the critical component of creative process and the internal drive that makes some people dedicate so much effort, even risking their life sometimes, to doing things that provide no immediate rewards. To make clear the notion of flow, Csikszentmihalyi provided us with a synonymous word, “*ecstasy.*” In Greek “*ecstasy*” means “*to step to the side of something*”, and thus people are no longer in ordinary reality, “*standing to the side of normal, everyday existence*” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). Csikszentmihalyi (2000) further explained the mechanism of flow by stating that, “*our mind is not able to process more than a limited amount of information, on the order of more or less, 120-150 bits a second*” (p. 6). Typical people use 60 bits per second to process a normal conversation, therefore, we are not able to process more than two everyday conversations at the same time. Thus, when we reach our full potential of information processing capacity, we are simply not able to register any more information other than what we are so deeply engaged in. This is the level where “*you can’t tell the dancer from dance*” as the poet Yates wrote, and when “*you are so much a part of what goes in that you are at one with it*” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 8).

How do John, Grace, and the rest of the participants devote so much effort to studying and cultivating their talents for such a long period of time without fatigue? Music is a good example to answer with because all of the participants have played a musical instrument since they were very young. When we play a musical instrument, we know what note we want to hit in the next moment, and we can hear whether we hit that note or not. If we hit the note as intended, a harmonious sound is produced, and accumulation of these harmonious sounds becomes music. However, if we fail to hit the right note, it will produce a cacophony. My point here is that the participants of the current study are disciplined enough to be able to appreciate the immediate feedback that continuously reverberates in their ears, which is internal, immediate, and almost hidden to the outsiders who are not trained to play the musical instrument. The participants appear to experience flow when they are engaged in the cultivation of their talents, even though the degree and intensity may not exactly fit into the original definition of Csikszentmihalyi's, but it is certainly above the level of non-gifted individuals as evidenced by the afore-cited statements of John and Grace. I think the diligence of the participants in the current study is well explained using the concept of flow, in which one is constantly, immediately, and internally motivated by appreciating feedback inherent in the task one undertakes.

The experience of flow can also apply to academic endeavors such as reading and studying as well. In fact, reading is the most frequently mentioned flow activity around the world (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). How does reading provide us with internal, immediate, and constant feedback? Reading is more enjoyable when we begin to visualize the characters, the events, the landscape, and the settings, even though most of

the time the visualization and filling in the information gaps occur without conscious effort. When a child reads a story, he begins to make little predictions as to who is the good guy, who is the bad guy, who is going to marry whom, and how the problem is going to be solved, and all these predictions create the internal drive for the child to keep reading from one page to the next. As a child really reads on, the child is getting answers to his little predictions as to who is really the bad guy and whom the good guy will marry, and how the problem eventually is resolved, etc. If a child does have these expectations in his/her head, and s/he does not get the answers to her/his predictions, the child is not hooked with reading the story (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Therefore, it is clear that one has to have a certain level of fluency in reading or previous successful experiences with academic tasks to keep devoted to any task undertaken. The participants in the current study are all highly gifted and extremely fluent readers, and thus they have been able to enjoy the immediate and constant feedback internally structured by reading and studying itself. It is a synergistic cycle in that as you do it more, you become better at it, and you are able to appreciate more internal, immediate, and constant feedback from the task you are undertaking. To outside observers, this phenomenon may be known as astonishing studiousness or diligence without fatigue of some gifted individuals.

There may be many implications of this finding for educational practice and theory. In educational practice, teachers may want to structure their instruction to allow the students to have time to fill the information gaps. For instance, a teacher might have a student elaborate on the setting of a story when they have information about the characters of the story or vice versa. Or, the teacher could play a piece of music and ask the students to describe the music in adjectives or colors and give the reasons why they

choose the particular adjective or color. Through this kind of instructional practice if the students are able to appreciate the internal immediate feedback that comes directly from the task itself, the students may experience flow. Once they experience flow, the students will be more likely to be successful because the synergistic cycle will ensue: flow experience → internal, constant, and immediate feedback from the task → performing with elevated intensity → getting it better → more intense feeling of flow. This finding implies a threshold hypothesis in instructional theory (Ricciardelli, 1992). The threshold hypothesis refers to the fact that if one wants to benefit from the flow experience, one must reach a certain threshold level to truly appreciate the internal and immediate feedback that directly comes from the task itself.

Bilingual and bi-cultural identity

Every participant demonstrates a strong sense of who they are; Americans with Korean heritage including language and traditions. When the *sense of identity* is defined as having a firm and coherent sense of who you are, where you are heading, and where you are fit into society (Erikson, 1963), the participants of the current study also have to establish *ethnic identity* in addition to their identity as Americans. Ethnic identity refers to a personal identification with an ethnic group and its language, values, and traditions (Lee, Chang, & Miller, 2006). However, forming a positive ethnic identity under the gravitational force of majority mainstream values is not always an easy task. Some minority children may even identify at first with the culture's ethnic majority, wanting to affiliate with the hegemonic group that has the most status in the society, and this experience may lead them to suffer from the psychological state of confusion, the feeling of inadequacy, and the traumatic sensation of not-belonging (Shaffer, 2000). Therefore,

forging a strong ambidextrous bilingual and bi-cultural identity, evidence of successful resolution of identity confusion, is a precocious and tremendous achievement of the participants of this study because Erikson (1963) originally assumed the identity crisis occurs in early adolescence and is often resolved by ages 15 to 18, considering the participants were from twelve to thirteen year olds.

One Hispanic adolescent who experienced ethnic identity confusion, for instance, stated, "*I remember I would not say I was Hispanic. My friends... were White and Oriental and I tried so hard to fit in with them*" (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992, p. 158). The ethnic minority youths who are undergoing identity confusion encounter conflicts between the values of their subculture and those of the majority culture. If Korean American minority adolescents are judged as "too white" among their peers, they are stigmatized as "*bananas*", *yellow on the outside but white on the inside*. Those so-called bananas are at risk because they are not fully accepted by the white mainstream and Korean American minority subculture at the same time, and thus they are marginalized and socio-politically deprived of their voices. Therefore, unsuccessful resolution of identity confusion is a devastating psychological crisis because the *identity crisis* may cause the feelings of confusion, anxiety, and personal inadequacy. The identity crisis is a term coined by Erikson (1963), and refers to the uncertainty and discomfort that adolescents experience when they become confused about their present and future role in life. Since the sense of identity involves so many important choices in life, Erikson proposed the successful resolution of the identity crisis is the most important developmental task adolescents face. The participants in the current study repeatedly

reveal a strong sense of bilingual and bi-cultural identity, feeling proud and comfortable as Americans with Korean heritage.

Every one of the participants in the current study speaks 100 percent Korean when they speak to their grandparents and other adults in their ethnic community. Their fluency in Korean includes not only speaking and listening, but also reading and writing. Actually Kevin, one of the participants in the current study, is so fluent in the Korean language that when he visited Korea “*people in restaurants think that I’ve been always been in Korea.*” This facility in his parents’ language in addition to confidence in his English ability may help him to forge a strong and fluid sense of ethnic identity. This level of linguistic competence, particularly in reading and writing, does not develop unless one has consciously put forth a significant amount of time and effort for a long time. Judging by the Korean language skills of the participants, it is evident that their bilingualism is the fruition of a conscious goal-oriented investment. The following statement of Aimee provides us with rich information about the participants’ fluid identity, “*for my grandparents [I speak] like 100% Korean. And for [my younger siblings] 60% English and 40% Korean.*” Aimee was born in the United States, and has been mainstream-educated to her 8th grade, with many English language achievements such as publishing poems, participating in a Duke University summer gifted program, taking the PSAT in 7th grade, and being a four time consecutive spelling bee champion in her county. When she speaks to her younger siblings, however, she uses Korean 40% of the time, and I interpreted it as evidence of her bilingual and bi-cultural identity. Were her Korean heritage not an integral part of her identity, she might easily have become a monolingual English speaker, or at the least she would not have spoken to her younger

siblings using Korean because it would take too much conscious effort. This interpretation is supported by the fact that every participant including Kevin prefers English to Korean because they feel more confident in and comfortable with English. In fact, the participants in the present study consider their English ability better than that of typical English monolingual peers. They do not have any antagonistic feelings toward the American mainstream language and value systems. Therefore, they are ambidextrous with their identity in the mainstream and their own sub-culture.

According to Phinney & Rosenthal (1996), once ethnic identity is achieved, minority youth tend to enjoy higher self-esteem, better relations with parents and peers, and more positive views of their own and other ethnicities than their counterparts who still have premature diffused or foreclosed identities. Erikson (1963) defined *identity diffusion* as a status of identity characterized by individuals who are not questioning who they are and have not committed them to an identity. *Identity foreclosure* is characterized by individuals who have prematurely committed themselves to occupations or ideologies without carefully thinking about them. Forming a mature and healthy identity involves many important choices: with what degree of academic success should I feel satisfied? What kind of career do I want after graduation? What language should I learn and use? What ethnic, cultural, religious, moral, and socio-political values should I adopt? Factors such as higher self-esteem, trusting relationships with parents and peers, a positive view of their bi-cultural identity, and a mature self-identity have emerged repeatedly through the data analysis. Overall, the participants in the current study reveal all the signs of having a mature identity.

Positive formation of ethnic identity manifests a critical importance in adolescents, especially for ethnic minority youths. What can educators do to help minority youths to construct a positive ethnic identity? We should promote a greater understanding and appreciation of ethnic diversity, starting early in the preschool years of the ethnic minority children's life because it has been consistently reported that the effect of ethnic (cultural) diversity education is most efficient when it is done at the preschool age (Burnette, 1997). To promote the efficacy of educational input vs. output, curriculum developers and early childhood educators should heed the fact that there exists a critical period for ethnic diversity education. Last but not least, parents who adopt children of different races than their own should teach their adopted children about their own subgroup culture and foster their own ethnic pride early on. Those parents may want to join a parent association or a social network in which their adopted children can engage in some meaningful social activities while the parents may share parenting skills. It is very unfortunate that unconditional love from the parents, complete English monolingualism, and absolute assimilation to mainstream values do not eliminate any chance of an identity crisis for adopted ethnic/racial minority children.

Pragmatism: keen sense of the tangency between current actions and future goals

The findings of this study indicate that the participants are all pragmatists, having a keen sense of practical, matter-of-fact ways of approaching, assessing, and solving the problems they encounter. The term *pragmatic* in this chapter refers to having a heightened and realistic sense of the interactive relationship between one's current actions and the fruition of future goals. The statement made by Hannah epitomizes the pragmatic personality trait, "*if you are going to have to do it later anyways* [doing

homework or getting educated], *so why not do it right then and there ... and if you do it, why not do the best you can.*” Also, every participant in the present study has learned a third language in addition to English and Korean with a very practical and specific reason. It is very reasonable for them to think that learning a third language is relatively easy because of the *synergistic effect*, which refers to structural knowledge acquired by learning a second language facilitating the learning of a third language. To make this point clear, Aimee stated, *“also to learn languages is easier because a lot of English words are based on Spanish.”* Aimee, Kevin, and Hannah have learned Spanish in addition to English and Korean. John and Grace have ambitiously learned not just Spanish but also French from a very early age, besides English and Korean. It is evident that they have learned additional languages with very practical reasons in their minds, being that practical reasons the synergistic effect of mastering a second language makes it more manageable to learn a third language.

The heightened and realistic sense of interwoven relationships between their current choices and the actualization of their future goals can be understood in terms of the *delayed gratification* concept. The concept of *delay of gratification* is defined as *“a form of self-control that involves the capacity to inhibit impulses to seek small rewards available immediately in the interest of obtaining larger, delayed incentives”* (Shaffer, 2000, p. 181). Every participant in the current study displays the practical and purposeful behaviors of self-control, evidenced in the statement, *“if you have to do it, do it right then and there; once you do it, do it with your best efforts.”* Not only the statement a sign of practicality, but it also demonstrates the values of delayed gratification and self-regulation because Hannah chooses to do the homework project right away, forsaking the

immediate relaxation of doing something more pleasant such as watching TV, taking a nap, or doing nothing, etc. The qualities of practicality, self-regulation, and delayed gratification are a reasonably stable attributes, and these attributes favor the outcomes of academic competency, better social skills, more self-reliance, and better ability to cope with stressful situations for the participants than their less practical and self-controlled peers (Shaffer, 2000). Consistent with the findings of Shaffer (2000), the highest scorers on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) tend to display more practicality, self-control, and ability to delay gratification (Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990). Overall, not only are practicality and self-control a relatively stable personality traits, but they are reliably tied to the characteristics of cognitive competency, self-confidence, and social skills that forecast high self-esteem, occupational success, and better interpersonal skills in later adult life (Shaffer, 2000). In light of existing research findings, the participants in the current study who display a high level of practicality and self-control in their decision makings are prognosticated to have more promising and successful adult lives.

Research findings on practicality and self-control imply that the personality traits are relatively stable attributes and they are acquired at the toddler stage of one's life (Shaffer, 2000). It means that once an individual displays poor judgment in practicality and poor self-regulation, it will be very hard or at least cost-ineffective to educate or correct the individual's lack of practicality or self-control because *stable* personality attribute acquired at an early is perhaps *uneducable*. The debate over *nature vs. nurture* has been with us from the very inception of institutionalized pedagogy, and some of the most representative nature domain terms include *genetic, in-born, hardwired, and stable attributes acquired at a very early age* (LeDoux, 1998). Perhaps one appropriate way to

address this issue would be through parenting education because children are almost purely under the influence of their own parents in their infant and toddler stages. Many public school curricula have been driven by traditions, and empirical data from educational research have been slow in impacting actual school settings. Administrators and educational policy makers should pay attention to the fact that only about 20% of all high school graduates go to college and the remaining 80% go into the work force without any preparation regarding parenting skills and understanding of human development. In terms of the presented data and rationales above, the benefits of parenting education in a public high school level appear to be any less significant than those of the traditional cognitive academic subjects such as math and English.

Enhanced perspective-taking ability: cognitively and socially being able to put themselves into others' shoes

The participants in the current study empathetically understand the behaviors of others by putting themselves in others' shoes cognitively and socially. They are very insightful to the perspective of the question posers, whether a teacher, an interviewer, or a peer so that they provide answers to the posed questions in a succinct and poignant fashion. In the social domain, they have maintained an exceptionally respecting, trusting, and compassionate relationship with their parents, not because their parents are perfect or faultless but because they are able to see things from their parents' point of view. Also, they respect the teachers who challenge them with questions requiring higher order thinking skills. Overall, enhanced perspective-taking ability plays a significant role for them to succeed in academic performance and to maintain compassionate relationships with their parents, adults in their ethnic communities, teachers in school, and peers.

The enhanced *perspective-taking* ability of the participants repeatedly emerged through the data analysis, when the term *perspective-taking ability* is defined as the ability to infer others' thoughts, intentions, motives, and attitudes by putting oneself into others' situations (Geiger, 1997). The participants of the current study are more perceptive and insightful in grasping the essence of relationships, situations, and problems. Aimee has maintained a very trusting and empathetic relationship with her parents because of her enhanced perceptiveness, not because her parents are faultless as evident in her statements ***“You have to look at the parents view cuz like parents have to go through hard things too. I think that our parents had it a little harsher cuz like we are in America, a different environment. So I wish he [father]’d be more...patient. Same goes for me, I wish I could be more patient too, because I also have a temper. Maybe like next time my dad yells at me, I should just be like ‘chill’ and wait it out, But like, if it doesn’t change, I’d still be okay. But if it did change, I’d like it.... [About friends] Like you have to know the difference between friends and users. Like, some people use you and some people are really your friends.”*** Also, Kevin’s case illuminates his cognitive perceptiveness because he has been exceptionally adroit in responding to the questions facilitating higher order thinking skills, ***“I like science the best, because of the E.Q.*** [Essential Question, a question that facilitates students’ higher order thinking skill].... [About teachers who do not challenge students] *and like she [my teacher] doesn’t even care. Like, there are those types of teachers that teach because they really want to teach. And then there’re teachers that just teach because they want to make money. I like the teacher... [who]... pushes me, challenges me to think.”*

Indeed, enhanced perspective-taking ability is one of the most apparent personality attributes of highly gifted individuals. When Cornell and Grossberg (1989) asked parents to write their own definitions of giftedness, the perceptiveness or insightfulness of their own children emerged as the most frequently mentioned characteristic by 40 % of the respondents, and the descriptors *perceptive* and *insightful* are most directly translated into the *heightened sensibility* for the affective domain and enhanced *perspective-taking ability* in the cognitive domain in educational psychology (Geiger, 1997). Also, this personality trait leads the gifted individuals to find, define, modify, and solve various cognitive problems in more adroit ways. A study conducted in Australia (Parkinson, 1990), reported that 68 % of the parents of gifted children said that their children had unusual approaches to problem solving and atypical solutions, and 70 % felt that their children possessed “*superior powers of reasoning, ...of understanding meanings, and of seeing relationships*” (p. 11). Aimee exemplifies this in her response to father’s authoritative behavior, such as *yelling* at her and being *harsher*, based on her constructed understanding, and thus is able to maintain a respectful and compassionate relationship with her father. The dexterity of Kevin’s responses to essential questions (E.Q. in his science class) also testifies his enhanced perspective- taking ability in a cognitive domain because he may think like the science teacher by taking his teacher’s point of view.

For teaching practice, these findings imply that educators should challenge the students who demonstrate enhanced perspective-taking ability with questions that involve higher order thinking. Otherwise, these highly able students will quickly feel bored, and eventually dislike the teachers who do not pose intellectually challenging problems. Once

a teacher has lost the respect of the students, effective instruction will be less likely to occur. For pedagogical theory, I think it would be very interesting to develop an assessment instrument for perspective-taking ability and study its correlations to traditional intelligence tests. Creativity and intelligence are shown to be highly correlated up to an I.Q. of 120, but I.Q. does not provide a reliable prediction of creativity beyond 120 (Starko, 1995). In a similar vein, perspective-taking ability and intelligence may well be correlated to some degree, but perspective-taking ability may be a separate construct from intelligence once an individual possesses a certain threshold of intelligence.

Spirituality (religiosity): ideology and internal values help them to overcome material barriers

The participants in the current study are very faithful to their religious beliefs, and their religious ideology of altruism was consistently evident throughout the data analysis. Kohlberg (1984) defined altruism as concern for others and willingness to act on that concern. The participants all demonstrated unselfish concern for others and for bigger causes. Their altruistic concerns always emerged together with their unbending religious faith. John's religious faith and altruistic tendency are epitomized in his statement: *“usually I study the Bible before church... They [my parents] wanted me to be a pastor and like something like a missionary... I want to be like, a – a billionaire to give money to like, kids in Africa.”* The altruistic personality is clearly manifested in Aimee's statement as well; *“I sort of want to be a missionary...and like go to Africa and help kids there. Like, go all over the world to help children in need and show them God's words and love.”* The participants are idealists who describe themselves as having an obligation to cultivate their God-endowed potential to its limit to make a difference in the world.

The desire to actualize their potential to make this world a better place is a central component of their constructed self-identity. They do not seek to satisfy egotistic self-interests, immediate contentment, or materialistic pleasure. Kevin stated, “*my dad and mom are Christian people and they always tell me to do something **worthy in God’s eyes***.” Academic success may provide an internal reward, but it occurs over a long period of time, in a painstakingly gradual degree. In short, superior academic performance requires internal drive without immediate external rewards. This quality of internal value drive, altruistic concerns for others or bigger causes, is evident in Hannah’s statement, “*I just want to do something that like... be like...**good...and like helpful to other people***.” Also Grace stated, “*...the whole family has like **morning worship and prayer together**. ... I just know that my dad wants me to **win the Nobel Peace Prize***.” Overall, their spirituality and altruism appear to be an indispensable component of their identity, which may strongly affect their extraordinary achievements and persistence.

Not all gifted people may exhibit altruistic compassion, but those who are altruistic tend to make a profound commitment to other less fortunate people and to the social causes that involve caring for others and wanting to decrease the pain they feel in others, not even limited to people but extended to animals and environments as well (Lovecky, 1990). This commitment to decrease the suffering of other people may be direct and famous as in the example of Mother Teresa or Albert Schweitzer, or anonymous like everyday volunteers or bird watchers in our local community. One of the fascinating aspects of gifted children is that they are so committed and loyal to a cause or to people once they feel compassion (Lovecky, 1990). Once gifted people become compassionate, they tend to commit themselves so intensely to other people and ideas

that they will not give up their alliance with the people or ideas. For instance, Mahatma Gandhi of India forsook his life for the greater cause of independence of his nation, and Martin Luther King, Jr. forgave a college student who threatened to kill him just out of compassion for his fellow human beings' future and well-being (Milton, 1987). Every participant in the current study happens to be very altruistic, perhaps because of their ardent religious faith.

Since the participants in the current study are already altruistic, they are more likely to be very opinionated, having alliances with a specific group of people or social causes, according to the findings of Lovecky (1990). What implications do the findings of Lovecky have to do with educational theory and practice? For practice, it would be wise for parents and educators to build on the existing compassion and commitment of the highly altruistic gifted individuals instead of altering or obliterating their alliances when they are not able to agree with their children or students. For instance, not every parent in the participants of the current study would support their super performing daughter/son to becoming a missionary in Africa. However, it would be more prudent for them to approach their children with a compromising attitude, agreeing to support their child in becoming a missionary in Africa, but with a medical degree like Albert Schweitzer. In theory, it is predicted for altruistic gifted individuals benefit far more when they are provided with a range of options before they commit themselves, because it is very hard for them to disavow their loyalty once they done so. Educators who interact with highly gifted student should heed the fact that once the students commit themselves, it is hard for them to recant their commitment. It is perhaps because they are able to see things that average people may not be able to see.

Optimism: helps them to be resilient when they encounter hardship and failure

Optimism refers to the ability to maintain a positive outlook in the face of adversity, without denying reality and the constraints it poses (Kelleher & Patterson, 2005). *Resilience* is defined as “*the set of attributes that provides people with the strength and fortitude to confront the overwhelming obstacles they are bound to face in life*” (Sagor, 1996, p. 38). Optimists are resilient because they see adversity as a challenge, transform problems into opportunities, persevere in finding solutions to difficult problems, maintain confidence and rebound quickly after setbacks.

The participants in the current study consistently manifested optimism. *Grace*: “*Well, I’m in advanced [class] and next semester I’ll be in accelerated [class].... Overall, I would not change anything. It’s OK.*” *Hannah*: “*... But I am successful, actually very successful with my grades and stuff.... English-wise I’m more confident than most Americans.... I think it’s a matter of time, I mean I can make it happen... I don’t think I would change anything.*” *Aimee*: “*... wait it out.... But like, if it doesn’t change...I’d still be okay.*” *John*: “*Like even if I fail, I did my best and they understand me and they’re still optimistic about it.*” Even though they are extraordinarily successful in certain areas like academic achievement, they cannot be successful in every aspect of life. When they have encountered failures, hardships, or barriers, their optimistic interpretations of the situation have helped them not to quit, and thus over the long run, to succeed in the endeavors they undertook. It is obvious that nobody can have everything that they want. Therefore, people simply have to compromise somewhere in-between the given situation and ultimate satisfaction. And people tend to view these compromises either one or another, with optimism or

pessimism. Overall, the participants in the current study maintain an optimistic outlook, and thus are highly resilient in the face of adversities.

There are several benefits are reported about being optimistic (Kelleher & Patterson, 2005). Optimistic individuals have better social relationships, a higher level of physical and academic performance, greater flexibility in thinking, and faster recovery from illness and trauma. Also optimistic people are easily motivated to work harder, have a higher morale, and set challenging goals because they take a long-term view. When one has a short-term view, it is very hard to be resilient because even optimists sometimes cannot help having negative thoughts and victimized feelings temporarily. However, a long-term view makes it almost impossible not to be resilient because the hardship they are facing must pass in time. According to the findings of Kelleher and Patterson (2005), the psychological attribute of resilience originates from the optimistic viewpoint, and being able to take a long-term perspective on the situation at hand is the most significant factor contributing to optimism. But, then where does the ability to take a long-term perspective come from? I think it comes from the individuals' previous success experiences. Over the course of the twelve years of schooling from kindergarten through high-school, it is inevitable for students to encounter bad things beyond their control. If and when they successfully overcome the encountered adversity, the success experience may imprint psychological agility in their mind that enables them to take a long-term view, and the ability to see things with a long-term perspective consequently causes a chain reaction of being optimistic, and thus being resilient.

In the findings of the current study, being optimistic and thus being resilient imply a valuable thought-signpost for the journey of education. I think there may exist a certain

critical time period for an individual's success experiences. For instance, nobody can be 100% successful for the duration of one's life span, and by the same token, anybody can experience a failure or an adversity from time to time. Then why do some people become optimistic and some become pessimistic? I will discuss this question briefly in terms of Erikson's theory of psychological development (1972). The core of Erikson's theory is the notion that there are eight sequential developmental stages one must go through in which a crisis must be successfully resolved. Should the crisis of each developmental stage not be overcome successfully, it leads the individual to become *neurotic* due to excessive anxiety or emotional disturbance. Erikson proposed that the eight virtues should emerge as a result of successful resolution of each stage conflict: hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom, respectively (Erikson, 1972). The most significant contribution of this theory is the notion that a developmental crisis rises not from the internal forces of the person such as a hardwired genetic predisposition, "but rather the person's interaction with his or her environment" (Cross, 2001, p. 54). The second significant notion is that the states for each developmental task are not interactive, meaning that one cannot go back to a certain previous stage in a later phase of life. Among the swamp of experiences of success vs. failure, the timing of those particular experiences may lead a person to become either optimistic or pessimistic. If we agree with the postulations of Erikson, educators and parents have to provide their children and students with not only the right remedies but also at the right time. Educational practice should leave its door open to the findings of educational research, particularly for developmental psychology to find the best time to instruct a certain curriculum.

Supportive and functioning families

A gifted child in the family can be a mixed blessing, contrary to the rumors that every parent prays to have their own gifted children and gifted children are all good in every aspect. From birth on, gifted children can pose an unusual set of parenting challenges. They tend to begin their life as unusually active babies, sleeping less than other infants and responding intensely to their environmental stimuli (Silverman, 1993). Many parents become exhausted in meeting the needs of their unusually precocious babies (Silverman, 1993), and they may think that they have an unusually fussy baby. As the baby grows, they often question their adequacy to provide for their baby's unusual needs or they may even suspect that their baby has an unknown health condition. It is stressful raising any type of exceptional child, but it is especially burdensome with gifted children because the special needs arising from the giftedness often send a mixed message, highly functioning yet atypical behaviors. The participants in the current study represent the amalgam of the above-mentioned interactions among the precocious children, puzzled parents, and their environments because they are all highly gifted children identified an early age.

It looks as though gifted children take gifted parents. The parents of the participants in the current study are all unusually hard workers who give tremendous amounts of support to their own children. They have functioned as immediate, constant, and always available resources when their children need them. Most of them are first generation immigrants, and they tend to have jobs that are not compatible with their educational background in their native land. For this reason, they work almost unbearable workloads from early in the morning to late at night. In the meantime, the enhanced

perspective-taking ability of the participants permits them to see through to the fundamental reason for their parents' hard work, which is to provide for the monetary needs of their children. The two seemingly incongruent factors appear to produce a synergistic effect on the educational success of the participants. That is, the participants study harder to show their appreciation of their parents' hard work and the parents can keep bearing their heavy workloads and long schedules because they perceive their children's success as rewards. *Aimee: ... "that doesn't mean that American kids have it better off than we do. I don't really think that they [American kids] have it better, because **you have to look at the parents' view** because like parents have to go through hard things too and **if your children aren't really doing what they are supposed to do...** Yeah, like being Korean we learned a lot of traditions. We **respect our parents more** because I think it's in our culture." Hannah: "Well **Korean kids are better behaved most of the time**, and some Americans treat their adults really badly... **they** [parents] **work really hard**. And they get up at 8am and go to work at 9am and then he [father] comes home at around 9 pm. Grace: "Like our parents they say that they **did everything their parents told them to do**. So like **I obey my parents first...** Both my parents work, my dad started working for the church, he **wakes up at 4:50 am** and then he goes to open the [church] door. My mom goes to work at the [fast food restaurant]."*

*Kevin: "Um well **my parents work hard**. They work at a laundry place and it opens at 7AM and we close at 10PM. Monday through Sunday. John: My dad he works as a pathologist in a hospital downtown and he leaves for work at 8AM and he works until 2AM."*

As evident in the previously described interaction patterns between gifted children and their parents, giftedness is a family affair because there are far-reaching implications for every member of the family. Once a gifted child is born into a family, the family becomes a gifted system because the gifted characteristics of the child affect every individual in the family. The findings of this study imply that research about giftedness should not be limited to the gifted individuals themselves, but should be more extended to family, ethnic community, and even the ethos of the era and overall social milieu. It is because giftedness is a product of a system, that being a family, a community, a specific historical period, or an overall social ethos. The extraordinary success of the participants in the current study is an amalgam of interactions among gifted students themselves, their immediate families, their ethnic communities, the current social ethos of materialism, and the specific transitional experience of being second generation Korean Americans with first generation parents who hold authoritarian Confucian value systems.

Fostering a wide range of interests in the children: education is the first priority

Not all gifted individuals decide what to do with their life in high school and college (VanTassel-Bask, 1993). Like many, some do not find their true calling until mid-life and move from job to job within a profession or have several different careers in their lives. It is particularly important for gifted individuals to explore a wide range of interests before they commit themselves, because it is very common for gifted individuals to have multiple potentials in a variety of fields (VanTassel-Bask, 1993). Therefore, parents and educators of gifted children should encourage their children to explore a wide range of fields so that they do not close the doors to opportunities prematurely.

The parents of the participants in the current study have fostered a wide range of interests in their children, and they have spent a significant portion of their disposable family income on their children's education and cultivation of talents in several fields. Every participant has played at least one musical instrument from a very early age: two of them play for their county youth symphony and one for the school orchestra. Also, three of the five families have paid for private math tutoring and Hak-Won (Korean private commercial tutoring institute), and four of them have paid for Tae-Kwon-Do or Gum-do (Korean Martial arts of sword fighting) lessons as well as some seasonal sports such as soccer and swimming. Every family has made conscious investments for their children's academic success and cultivation of some special talents, regardless of the family's financial condition. *Hannah: "Mondays, after school, I have **violin** for an hour... Oh yeah! Also on Saturday I have **math tutoring and Korean school** [Korean School of Atlanta]. I also have **orchestra** on Sunday." John: "Monday through Thursday I have...**Hak-Won** [tutoring/study]. ... I go to **Taekwondo**, Monday, Wednesday, Friday. On Saturday, I go to **Korean school** until noon and then I go to **violin lessons** and then I go to **orchestra**." Aimee: "On Monday, I either have **Taekwondo** or I'm free. On Tuesdays, I have **dance, and orchestra**. Wednesday, I have **Taekwondo**, and Thursday I have **piano**. On Saturday, I have **math tutoring and Korean study**. Oh yeah, I have **soccer**, but only when it's like soccer season." Kevin: "I do **Gum-do** every day. And on Saturday, I have **piano lessons and Korean study**" [Korean School of Atlanta]. Grace: "On Monday afternoon, I go to **piano lesson**... I have **Korean Study** [Korean School of Atlanta] on Saturday."*

Gifted children are often multitalented, and thus they have potential for success in many different fields. Therefore, providing them with the opportunity to explore different fields of interests and encouraging them to cultivate a wide range of talents is ideal, but a real career selection and focus on a narrow specific interest should wait until the last minute because the broad spectrum of potential and talents increases the complexity of their decision-making process (VanTassel-Bask, 1993). Through this study, I learned that it takes gifted parents to bring-out the giftedness of a child because the parents of the participants in this study have done exactly what the most recent research findings recommend. They have fostered a wide range of interests with the best resources that they can afford. Sometimes, the aspirations they have instilled into their children's minds look too idealistic and ambitious, like striving to win a Nobel Peace Prize at the age of twelve. However, those parents are extremely prudent in their judgment not to pressure their gifted child to prematurely focus on a specific talent, select a particular field, and limit the diverse interests to a materialistically profitable area. Overall, parenting factors are as significant as the personality factors of the gifted students themselves in their exceptional success.

Recommendations for the Future Research

In reflection of this dissertation study, which lasted for some years from its inception to presenting this research report, I offer the following recommendations for improving and clarifying subsequent inquiry. These recommendations focus on the questions that may arise for the future research on the quality of giftedness in personality and contextual domains, and Korean Americans or Asian American studies.

First, the participants in the current study are all highly gifted middle school students identified at an early age. It would be interesting to replicate this study with high school participants at a more mature developmental phase, to determine if similar personality traits and contextual factors would emerge. In addition, one could replicate this study with a different level of giftedness at the same maturity level to determine if similar themes would emerge because it would tell from where the findings of this research originate: in degree of giftedness, the participants' value systems, or environments. Moreover, it would be interesting to conduct a follow-up, longitudinal study with the same group of participants to see how the identified six personality factors and two contextual factors affect them in different phases of their life.

Second, the participants of this study demonstrate much difference in their behaviors across sexes. It would be interesting to conduct another study specifically designed to examine the differences between the highly gifted male Korean Americans and female Korean Americans. Research such as this may provide us with not only a more complete understanding of the participants but also offer better understanding of the sex differences.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to contextualize the findings of the present study over the existing literature of educational psychology. To accomplish the purpose, I discussed the emerged eight factors in light of the relevant literature of educational psychology, presented implications for the theory and practice of educating highly gifted Korean American students, and finally offered recommendations for the future research.

Studiosness of the participants of this study was discussed in parallel with the experience of *flow* by Csikszentmihalyi. A case was made in regard to the participants of their bilingualism as an integral part of ethnic identities, and the implications of forging a health ethnic identity was discussed in terms of the research findings of identity development. I paralleled the practicality of the participants with the ability of delayed gratification, and the enhanced perspective-taking ability of them was discussed in terms of their cognitive fluidity and emotional heightened-sensitivity. I discussed the religiosity of the participants in light of altruism, internal value-drive, and moral development, and the optimistic personality of the participants was juxtaposed to the research finding on a long-term view perception and resiliency. The two additional findings were contextualized in an ecological system-view, discussing interactive nature of gifted participants, their family, social milieu, and contemporary ethos of the historical period. All these discussions were teased out in terms of theoretical and practical implications.

Finally, suggestions for the future research were made in light of the findings and insights of the current study.

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APPENDIX A: Participant Identification Survey

Name _____ Grade _____ Tel/E-mail _____

The following short questionnaire is designed to gather information about you and your school experiences. The questionnaire is the part of dissertation research for one of the faculty members at the Korean American School of Atlanta (KASA), and the information you provided will be only used for the dissertation purpose. The anonymity of you and your response is guaranteed. Also, responding this questionnaire DOES NOT constitute your agreement to participate in the research. You may respond the following questions in either English or Korean language. Should you experience any difficulties with expressing your ideas in Korean language, please feel free to use English.

Date of Birth _____ (mm/dd/year) Class in Korean School _____

Name of your regular American school _____

1. How long have you attended the Korean American School of Atlanta (KASA)?
_____ years.
2. Have you studied Korean language in any other institutes before you came in our school (KASA)? _____ If yes, how long? _____ years.
3. What language do you use when you communicate with your parents in home?
_____ If you have used both Korean and English, how much do you use Korean or English in percentage-wise?
English _____ % **and Korean** _____ %
4. Were you born in the United States of America? _____
If not, where were you born? _____ How long have you been in the States? _____ years.
5. Have you ever served in any type of gifted programs in your regular American school? _____ If yes, when have you been first identified as a gifted student? _____ What was the gifted program name in your local school district? (ex. Spectrum, Target, Magnet, Focus, Pulse, Pace, etc)

APPENDIX B: Focus Group Interview Guide

It should be noted that the goal of the loosely structured interview guide in qualitative research paradigm is to allow a conversational approach to the collection of data from the perspective of the participants in a naturalistic manner. The open-ended questions below are designed to serve as an interview guideline and signpost. Often times, these questions lead to other similar lines of inquiry which may more fully inform and clarify the research questions being studied. Typically, the interviews should continue to reach a saturation, which refers to the point where no new information about phenomenon being studied emerges through continued interview conversations. With practicality concern, however, this interview guide was developed for three to five interview sessions in mind.

1. Give us your name and tell us something about your experiences with gifted education (note that each school system calls gifted education with different names such as Spectrum, Magnet, Focus, Target, and Prime class etc.).

When were you admitted into a gifted program for the first time?

How long have you been served in gifted a program?

One thing that you have most enjoyed in a gifted program?

One thing that you have most disliked about a gifted program?

How does being served in gifted education affect you?

Academically?

Your self-esteem?

Your ethnic community life such as family and church?

Do you think you are being treated better by your teachers and

other ethnic students because you are a gifted student?

Tell us something more about your gifted education experiences?

2. How do you consider your Korean language ability? How about your English ability?

Have you learned any other language other than English and Korean?

When did you begin to learn Korean language for the first time?

How long have you learned Korean language officially such as coming to the

Koran American School of Atlanta?

Why have you learned Korean language and culture? Tell us some more about the reasons that you have learned Korean language and culture.

What difference does it make for you to be able to speak Korean language in addition to English? Tell us some more about it.

Have you ever visited Korea and used your Korean language skills with Korean native speakers? If so tell us more about your experiences about visiting Korea.

3. Particular language skills and one's own ethnicity are almost inseparable. Tell us your experiences about growing up as an ethnically minority person.

Tell us about your parents.

Their job?

Their education level?

Sibling and birth order?

How much do your parents spend time with you?

How much do they help you with your academic and extracurricular activity?

What is your parents' expectation out of you?

What do you particularly respect about your parents?

What aspect of parenting would you change if you can about your
parents'?

Tell us some more about yours and your parents' experience about being a
Korean immigrant in the United States

4. Tell us about your academic performance and your career aspiration.

What makes you be successful with your academic performance?

Efforts?

Extracurricular activities?

Watching TV?

Hanging out with friends?

Intelligence and innate ability?

Social capitals?

Do the parental involvement, significant others' guidance, social network, and the time and financial supports from your parents or significant others affect your academic performance? Tell us something more about it.

Family and ethnic values?

Do you study hard to please your parents?

If so, why do you want to please your parents?

If other reasons, tell us about your reasons of studying hard.

What is unique about your parents that you think your
parents are different from other typical American parents?

Tell us some more about it.

Future aspiration and social upward mobility?

Do you think school performance and your future aspiration are
directly tied? How? Tell us more about it.

Environment?

Does a circumstantial environment surrounding you affect your
motivation to study hard? Tell us about your neighborhood.

About your home environment? Tell us more about it.

Tell us more about the reasons why you are successful with your academic
Performance

5. How do you feel that your participation in a gifted program affect your life?

How does a gifted program help you to perform better with your academic
subjects?

What can be done differently to enhance the impact of gifted education on
you?

Do you think that participation in gifted program enhance your self-
esteem? How? Tell us more about it.

Do you feel that you can have it your way when you academically perform
excellently in your school community?