

# Everyday Information Practices of ‘Isolated’ Adolescents: A Case Study of New Korean Immigrant Adolescents in the U.S.

소외 청소년의 일상적 정보행태: 재미 한인 청소년을 사례로 하여

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to explore how isolated immigrant adolescents seek and use necessary information when they are unable to use significant information sources—their peer groups—in the period of transition before new peer groups are established. Sixteen recently arrived Korean immigrant adolescents were recruited and a mixed method including surveys and in-depth interviews was used through three research phases. This study gained a preliminary understanding of isolated immigrant adolescents’ information world: how they interpret their current situations and daily hassles, seek (or do not seek), and utilize information to cope with their daily life problems, and evaluate their use of information, including library systems and interpersonal sources. Five main emergent themes were analyzed from the findings and pertinent theories/models to interpret these unique features were suggested and discussed. The contribution and limitation of the study and future study are suggested and discussed.

Keywords: Everyday information practice, Adolescent, Isolation, Peer, Korean immigrant in the U.S.

## 초 록

이 연구의 목적은 청소년들이 그들의 가장 중요한 정보원인 또래집단으로부터 소외되었을 때, 그 삶 속에서 당면하고 있는 일상적 고민의 실체와 정보행태적 특징을 파악하는데 있다. 이를 위해, 최근 미국으로 이민간 16명의 한인 청소년들을 사례로 하여 그들의 이민 과정, 일상적 고민과 정보요구, 정보추구 및 회피과정, 그리고 도서관을 비롯한 정보시스템의 이용 과정에서 드러나는 특징을 조사하였다. 조사 결과 밝혀낸 5가지 정보행태적 특징을 기존 정보이론과 모델에 비교하여 분석함으로써, 또래집단으로 부터 소외된 청소년의 정보행태를 이해하기 위한 이론적 기반을 마련하고자 하였다. 한편, 연구문제를 논의하는데 필요한 데이터는 설문조사와 심층면담을 통해 수집하였고, 이 연구의 의미와 한계 그리고 후속 연구들이 논의되었다.

키워드: 일상적 정보행태, 사춘기 청소년, 소외, 또래집단, 재미 한인 이민자

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## I . Introduction: Purpose of the Study

Adolescents' salient feature—to seek autonomy from their parents and turn to their peers to solve their life problems—is natural and significant phenomenon in the processes to complete their development tasks (Veed 2009). Peer acceptance and feeling connected to peers appear to be vital to adolescents' healthy growth (Scholte and Aken 2006). In addition, some studies in library and information studies [LIS] discovered that teens regard their peers as their favorite and most valuable information sources to obtain necessary information (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell 2007; Meyer, Fisher, and Marcoux 2007).

However, for many reasons, adolescents can find themselves isolated from their peers in their daily life. Especially adolescents immigrated or transferred from other schools or countries may experience difficulties in joining established social groups due to differences in culture, language, social norms, normative behaviors, etc. In a transitional period, these immigrant adolescents can find themselves easily isolated from peers and their peers are unavailable to them as an information source. When this happens, how do they compensate this lost but significant information source? How isolated immigrant adolescents seek information to cope with their social isolation and their daily life hassles?

In order to answer the above questions, this study explores information practice of recently arrived and Korean immigrants isolated from peers in the United States [U.S.]. The study provides a preliminary understanding of isolated teens' information world by describing young immigrants' needs, and how to seek information to cope with their daily stress and satisfy with their normative needs to achieve developmental tasks.

## II . Main Concepts and Literature Review

### 1. Terminologies: Operational Definition of Main Concepts

The main terms used in the title are somewhat general so that it is necessary to define what they mean in this research for mutual understandings.

*Adolescents* in this study refer young people between 12 to 18 years of age in the human life span. Among various definitions of age range, the research adopts the definition of YALSA [the Young Adult Library Services Association] division of ALA [the American Library Association] (1994). When considering the alternative information services for isolated adolescents, this age range will allow for implications to be applied to library and information services efficiently.

*Immigrants* are used in this study as the meaning of foreign-born population by following definition of U.S. Census Bureau (2013). Foreign-born populations include legal immigrants (or permanent resident aliens) and non-immigrants such as temporal migrants for education or business. As considering the continuous growth of the numbers of immigrant children engaged in education, including learning English (Ruiz-de-Velasco, Fix, and Clewell 2000), this study includes temporal sojourners or international students for education purposes, even though they are legally classified as non-immigrants.

*New (or recently arrived)* is used interchangeably as the period when immigrants have been in the U.S. less than three years. According to the U-curved theory, the result of classical studies about immigrants' adjustment (Lyskaard 1955; Oberg 1960), the time to reach safe adaptation take at least two years or more. Even though psychological adaptation follows the U-curved theory timing, social adjustment and integration need more times when considering individuals' gaps in acculturation in the new country (Ward et al. 1998). Hence, this study sets the definitional time of recently arrived immigrants as three years or less.

*Peers* in the study refer people of friendships in the levels of dyad and clique. Peers include three different levels of friendships: dyad, clique and crowd (Scholte and Aken 2006). Dyad is dominated by individual friendships between two people such as lab partners, peer tutors at school; Cliques are comprised of small and highly interactive groups and include special interest groups such as sports team, extracurricular activities; Crowd is a large group member that is no longer feasible for everyone to know each other personally. Regarding the concepts of social isolation and emotional loneliness, people usually feel emotionally lonely when they have little deep relationships in dyadic level and feel socially isolated when they have weak bonds and lack of a sense of belonging in their cliques (Veed 2009). However, belonging to a crowd is involuntary and related to ethnic identity or external reputation (Scholte and Aken 2006). Thus, this study limits the concept of peers as dyads and cliques, and excludes nominal social interaction at the level of the crowd.

The term of *isolation* can be used as absences of close friendship at the dyadic level and weak peer network at the clique level, and measure the condition of isolation in both dimensions with three scales in Psychology: the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona 1980); Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Canty-Mitvchell and Zimet 2000); Walker-McConnell Scale for Social Competence and School Adjustment (Merrell 2008). In order to distinguish the concepts between isolation and rejection coming from personal problems by lack of social skills, the study measures social competence and school adjustment skills and excludes rejected adolescents with low levels in social competence skills to make friends.

The term of *Everyday Life Information Seeking* (or everyday information practice) is used in the broad sense—informal information practices within daily life or special social contexts and non-working settings—rather than the limited meaning in Savolainen’s initial model (1995) and its components’ correlations.

## 2. Literature Review: Everyday Information Practices of Immigrant Adolescents

### (1) Everyday Information Practices

*Everyday Life Information Seeking Model*: Savolainen (1995) laid his groundwork for understanding individuals’ information-seeking in their daily life contexts and called it a model of ‘Everyday Life Information Seeking [ELIS].’ The term of ELIS has generally been understood and used to describe the ways people seek information in “non-work” contexts, in opposition to job-related information practice contexts that focus on professionals’ information seeking related to special tasks and works. It includes general individuals’ (citizens’) information practices, such as monitoring daily news, seeking information in the areas of leisure and hobbies, health care, housing, etc. The ELIS model based on social perspectives enables us to appreciate information practice as a part of the human communication processes mixed with cognitive, social, cultural, organizational, and affective factors (Pettigrew, Fidel, and Bruce 2001). Due to the above features of ELIS model, it is useful to explore the information world of normal laymen or social marginalized groups such as the vulnerable like isolated children within the perspectives of ELIS model. Accordingly, the ELIS model can be a pertinent theoretical framework for understanding isolated immigrant adolescents’ daily life conditions and information world.

*Study Related with ELIS Model*: The literature on information practices in everyday life and

within social contexts has grown using the terms of 'everyday life,' or 'daily life' and referring to ELIS model as a research area. Rather than following Savolainen's premises in exploring the hypothesis that way of life in the everyday and style of mastery of life, most of these studies explored information seeking by specific groups in different contexts such as, adolescents' making career decision in the everyday life settings (Julien 1999), abused and battered women and their help seeking (Harris and Dewdney 1994), homeless parents' everyday life information seeking through their social networks (Hersberger 2001), inner-city gatekeepers in information poverty (Agada 1999), people interested in paranormal issues (Kari 1998), and readers for pleasure (Ross 1999).

The importance of social perspectives in ELIS model inspired researchers who conducted studies related with ELIS model, including to modify Savolainen's initial model. There are, representatively, Williamson's Ecological Model (1998), McKenzie's Information Practices (2003), and Savolainen's Everyday Life Information Practice (2008). Studies related with ELIS model have the tendency to support the holistic approach in their social life contexts. As reflecting the features of current studies, this study uses the term of ELIS as the meanings of information practices within daily life contexts or specific social conditions or problems rather than narrow meaning of Savolainen's initial model (Savolainen 2008).

## (2) Immigrant Adolescents' Everyday Information Practices

There are a few information practice studies focused on adolescents conducted from the perspective of ELIS. Traditionally, studies of children's or young adults' information practices have been performed in the school setting with the purpose of learning activities or academic task performance. Studies using the perspectives of ELIS in the field of LIS are as follows: high school female seniors' information practices in decision-making for their careers (Julien 1999), adolescents' seeking drug information within the framework of Chatman's Information Poverty (Todd and Edward 2004), urban teens' ELIS (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell 2006), tweens'(early teens') ELIS using qualitative methods (Myers, Fisher, and Marcoux 2007), immigrant children's information seeking and their role as Immigrant Children Mediator [ICM] (Chu 1999). In addition, there are a few studies that reveal immigrants' (or immigrant children's) information needs and their features in LIS, even though the main targeted population is not adolescent groups: Courtright (2005) examined health information seeking among Latin American newcomers; Fisher, Durrance, and Hinton (2004) explored how immigrants and their families

benefited from library programs in literacy and coping skills; Fisher et al. (2004) discovered the information grounds of migrant Hispanic farm workers.

Through previous studies about adolescents' information practices and immigrants' studies, some conditions salient to this study are documented: immigrants (or immigrant children), in general, seek information sources gathered by interpersonal channels, making kinship networks like relatives or families. These interpersonal sources help them avoid the cultural and language barriers they faced in accessing formal information systems like libraries. Also, immigrants have a strong desire to fulfill affective needs like security or belongingness as well as to learn basic survival information for resettlement. In the case of adolescents' information practices in daily life contexts, due to developmental tasks and characteristics, they seek interpersonal information sources like peer groups as their most valuable sources, too. Even though the information given by adults is good and precise objectively, the information is meaningless if adolescents do not trust the information in terms of peer group. In conclusion, because there are few ELIS studies about immigrant or adolescents, the studies about the conditions that merge the two situations—immigrant adolescents—are even fewer, it is meaningful to work toward an understanding of immigrant adolescents' information practices in their specific condition—*isolation*.

### III. Method

#### 1. Sampling: Selection of Participants

In order to be selected as a participant, subjects should satisfy the three criteria according to the operational definition of the main concepts: (a) Korean immigrant (foreign-born population including permanent resident aliens and temporal sojourners for education) (b) adolescents (teens from 12 to 18 years old) (c) who have arrived in the U.S. recently (three years or less). The reason for selecting 'Korean' youth purposefully is to prevent miscommunication or difficulties in interviewing new immigrant adolescents with limited English skills. Most new immigrants have difficulty communicating in English and feel more comfortable speaking in their mother tongues. However, the researcher is a bilingual speaker in English and Korean, and new immigrants whose mother tongue is Korean were selected, as this allowed for precise and comfortable

communication with study participants.

Snowball sampling was utilized. Because new immigrant adolescents are “a hard-to-reach or hard-to identify populations,” the use of probability sampling was not possible (Schutt 2006, 157). The potential participants were referred through the study participants who were already recruited for the study and completed the interview and surveys. When participants expressed interest in the research via emails, calls, or direct face-to-face contacts, the researcher met the adolescents and their parents/guardians at their own houses or an agreed upon location. At that time, the researcher explained the research activities, goals, methods, and potential risks and benefits. After the explanation, the researcher obtained consent for participation from the parents/guardians and assent from the teen participants. Only participants who submitted the signed assent and parents/guardians’ consent to participate in the research were invited to participate in the survey and in-depth interview. The selection of new participants continued until the saturation point, the point when new interview yields little additional information, was reached (Schutt 2006).

## 2. Data Collection: Survey and In-depth Interview

### (1) Phase I: Demographic Profile Questionnaire

Demographic and information use environmental questions (Agada 1999) were asked using the prepared survey questionnaire sheet. A growing body of information practices studies suggests that analyzing the context or specific information environments—such as a particular information environment at a point in time, or geographic, organizational, and socio-cultural backgrounds—might be a good predictor of information needs and uses (Solomon 2002). Recognizing the importance of understanding adolescents’ environmental/background information, the study sought to describe participants’ environmental or demographic information under four main categories via survey: (a) Basic biographic information: participant’s gender, age, birthplace, and the length of stay in the U.S., etc.; (b) Family environments: relationships to parents/siblings, parents’ ages, social activities, socioeconomic status [SES] and assimilation with neighbors or other ethnic groups, etc.; (c) Neighborhood: to identify the neighborhood where they currently live and have grown up in S. Korea; (d) School environments: to identify school environments where the participants currently attend and have attended in S. Korea.

(2) Phase II: Measuring Level of Isolation

The study analyzed subjects' isolated status and their own perception about isolation and loneliness via surveys and in-depth interview. According to the operational definition of isolation, the study measured the three conditions—loneliness, social isolation, and social competence skill—with three scales. Also, the study described how the subjects evaluated and interpreted their current socio-affective conditions subjectively, regardless of the survey results. These supplementary questions—participants' peer-relationship, perception of isolation and loneliness, and assessment of their own peer-relationship within different cultural environments and social norms—were asked through in-depth interviews. The contextual/situational background and the reasons why the subjects chose their answers in the three surveys were scrutinized.

(3) Phase III: Information Practices in Daily Life Context by In-depth Interview

Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews in order to describe new Korean immigrant adolescents' information practices in coping with their daily problems. Because of the exploratory and holistic nature of this research, in-depth interview—a type of qualitative method that produces rich and authentic data to enhance the understandings of information practices—was used (Seidman 2006). The main categories of questions are: (a) the journey and experience of immigration; (b) current life problems and information needs; (c) used information sources and channels; (d) evaluation of used information sources and channels; (e) the meaning of information and library.

(4) Process of Survey and In-depth Interview

All interviews and surveys were conducted one-on-one in Korean. To ensure that there were no misunderstandings of the survey contents, the researcher read the questions in Korean and recorded each participant's answers. A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared as a map to guide the interview processes. Its primary purpose was to act as a memory-aid for the interviewer and achieve consistency in interviewing many subjects. To insure reliability, similar questions were repeated in different situations or different expressions in order to keep a consistency in the responses. Each of the interview and survey was held at the participants' home or a mutually-agreed place and took about three hours or more. All data of interviews and surveys were obtained between Jan. 2012 to April 2012 (4 months). The contents of the surveys and interviews were digitally recorded with audio-files. All data were transcribed in Korean and then



translated into English. Another bilingual (Korean-English) translator was recruited to verify the correctness of the translation.

### 3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the final English transcripts from intensive interview and surveys. First, an analysis of the demographic profile data collected via survey was conducted using content analysis. This analytic process was focused on presenting each research participant's qualitative characteristics rather than showing statistical degrees. Since the purpose of the survey is to identify subjects' characteristics in their information use environments, it is reasonable to perform descriptive analysis and systematic classification about each question category.

Second, analysis of surveys measuring the degrees of loneliness, social isolation, and social competence was calculated according to the technical directions of each measurement. In detail, the scores of the UCLA loneliness scale result ratings of highly lonely (80-61), somewhat lonely (60-41), average (40-31) and non-lonely (30-20) (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona 1980). In this research, subjects with total scores over 40 were regarded as lonely adolescents. When considering that the mean of the MSPSS is between 5.70 and 5.90 points (Canty-Mitvchell and Zimet 2000), only subjects with below 5.0 points in average of the total sum were regarded as isolated adolescents with low social support and networks. Finally, the scores of 'Walker- McConnell Scale for Social Competence and School Adjustment' are interpreted as highly functioned (160-121), average (120-91), at-risk (90-51), and high-risk (50-32) (Merrell 2008). Only subjects with over 90 points in total sum were regarded as adolescents with basic social skills.

Third, the analysis of intensive interviews used in the whole research phases utilized the procedures of grounded theory described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). This qualitative analysis uses basic techniques of questioning and making constant comparisons within the context of a close examination of transcript data. Hence, the transcripts were coded, categorized by theme, and compared to the contents of each interviewee. Several types of coding techniques were applied: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding and the one researcher conducted all data coding. Qualitative analysis of collected data was performed using the computer software *QSR NVivo 10*. In classifying and summarizing the contents within main themes provided by each interviewee, the analysis looked for patterns and similarities in interviewees' narration.

## IV. Finding: Isolated Korean Immigrant Adolescent's Information World

### 1. Key Features in Demographic Background and Migration Journey

A total of sixteen recently arrived and Korean immigrant adolescents (N=16) were recruited for identifying their level of isolation and everyday information practices. The overview of research participants by basic characteristics was shown in Table 1.

<Tab. 1> Participants and their Families' Basic Profile

Variable	N=16	Median (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Range
Gender				
Male	10 (62.5%)			
Female	6 (37.5%)			
Age (Year)		15	2.39	6 (12-18)
Period of Residency (Month)		14	10.78	34 (2-36)
Parents' Age (Year)				
Father		43.35	4.38	16 (39-55)
Mother		46.31	3.60	17 (41-58)

The participants have some unique characteristics in their demographic backgrounds and the reason for their migration journey. First, the study participants permanently or temporarily moved to the U.S. to have a chance of a better education. Their goal is unlike that of other immigrant groups who tend to immigrate to find better jobs or to avoid social issues (i.e., political or physical security). This feature matches the current trend of Korean immigration in the U.S. Since 2001—after the Korean government's legislation that allowed for early study abroad at a younger age—educational immigrants and temporal sojourners, such as international students or visiting scholars for educational purposes, have rapidly increased in the composition of Korean immigration (Korean Educational Development Institute 2005). This current trend in Korean immigration to the U.S. was reflected in this study of participants' immigration and their goal for immigration.

Second, immigration for a better education often results in temporary separation from family members. The study participants were classified into three groups according to who they lived with: (a) living with their whole family—all parents and siblings, (b) living with partial family members—without the father, and (c) living without any family members and with host family

members. This social phenomenon—dissolution or segregation of family members for children's education—is not at odds with, but is already a well-known social phenomena in Korean society (Korean Educational Development Institute 2005).

Third, most study participants' (or their parents') SES belonged to middle and upper classes. Participants' parents were at least college educated or higher and had professional jobs so that no participants experienced financial difficulties. Also, study participants' high SES and their goal of immigration is also reflected in the unique features of their past and current neighborhoods/community in S. Korea and the U.S.: middle or higher class neighborhoods with good school districts.

Finally, the Korean immigrant parents' behavior and deep passion for their children's education have been criticized by many educational scholars because these social phenomena have created further educational inequity and aggravated the gap and segregation between the high SES and the low SES groups (Choi 2004). In that sense, the study participants are a very particular group even within Korean society as well in the U.S., when compared to other ethnic immigrant groups within the U.S.

## 2. Interpretation of Isolation and Loneliness: Difference in Gender and Cultural Norm

Research subjects' levels of isolation were measured with three scales and the contextual background of the survey results were analyzed through in-depth interview. The survey results showed that all female adolescents except one participant—who experienced a life out of the country during her childhood, acquired proficient English skills, and familiarity with different ethnic peers at an international school for ambassadors' children in Japan—were regarded as isolators and all male teens except one male, lived in the U.S. for only two months and had no chance to make friends, were regarded as non-isolators. The comprehensive survey results are shown in Table 2.

However, in the in-depth interviews, they described themselves as social nerds or victims suffering from discrimination due to cultural differences and language barriers. Through intensive interviews, some unique features in the perception and subjective interpretation of their current isolated conditions are discovered as followings:

First, in regards to adolescents' perception of isolation and loneliness, gender difference was

〈Tab. 2〉 Participants' Level of Isolation: Result from the Three Survey Measurements.

Participants (Gender, Age)	Loneliness (UCLA Loneliness Scale)	Social Support (MSPSS Scale)	Social Competence Skill (Walker-McConnell Scale)	Evaluation: Level of Isolation
#1 (F, 12)	58 Lonely	3.3 Low supported	116 Average	<b>Isolated</b>
#2 (F, 12)	53 Lonely	3.25 Low supported	105 Average	<b>Isolated</b>
#3 (F, 12)	46 Lonely	3.58 Low supported	112 Average	<b>Isolated</b>
#4 (F, 14)	46 Lonely	3.75 Low supported	113 Average	<b>Isolated</b>
#5 (F, 16)	61 Lonely	5.0 Low supported	109 Average	<b>Isolated</b>
#6 (F, 16)	36 Average	4.83 Low supported	138 High functioned	Non
#7 (M, 12)	34 Average	4.58 Low supported	118 Average	Non
#8 (M, 12)	30 Non-Loneliness	5.3 Supported	147 High functioned	Non
#9 (M, 12)	49 Lonely	3.41 Low supported	120 Average	<b>Isolated</b>
#10 (M, 12)	32 Average	5.08 Supported	144 High functioned	Non
#11 (M, 16)	39 Average	5.01 Supported	110 Average	Non
#12 (M, 16)	37 Average	3.91 Low supported	141 High functioned	Non
#13 (M, 16)	22 Non-Loneliness	7 High supported	158 High functioned	Non
#14 (M, 17)	25 Non-Loneliness	4.91 Low supported	134 High functioned	Non
#15 (M, 18)	36 Average	5.91 Supported	108 Average	Non
#16 (M, 18)	28 Non-Loneliness	6.75 High supported	135 High functioned	Non

critical and evident, even though they are a very homogenous group and with similar environments in age, SES, period of residency, purpose of immigration, family situations, etc. Quantitatively, the results of the three measurement surveys matched the different subjective perceptions of isolation and social support by gender. In developing peer-relationships, male adolescents were satisfied when participating in club or school activities, but female students focused on affective closeness via verbal communication. If male adolescents had even one friend to eat lunch with or to engage in sport activities, they did not think that they were isolated or lonely even when they were identified as victims of peer-bullying and discrimination. On the

other hand, female adolescents did not think that individuals who provide them with brief information and/or aid as a valuable source of social support if they could not receive any affective empathy or sense of trust by sharing their private family stories, secrets, emotional changes, or daily life problems.

Second, the limits of three survey questions are that they did not consider cultural norms and behavioral dispositions. Participants had little sense of "appropriate" behavior in their new country. As evidence to demonstrate that these participants had little sense about their new host country's social norms or normative behaviors, all participants who were living with American host families described experiences of conflicts and big quarrels with their hosts during their initial resettlement because of a different perception about "good" and "appropriate" behavior as a minor and student, and because of different parenting styles and cultural norms. Nevertheless, in the survey measuring their social competence skills, they earned very high scores. Their high scores were related to Korean culture, which respects hierarchical social relations with elders or the use of honorific language or terms of respect to seniors, including teachers (Min 2006). Cultural background and different evaluations of normative behaviors could be one of the reasons why the participants were assessed as students who have high social competence skills, even though other dimensions of social skills, such as group discussion or appropriate social manners, etc. were absent because of their limited English skills and little sense of American normative behaviors.

In spite of different reactions to similar conditions by gender, all participants acknowledged that there were big differences between them and their American peers resulting in barriers and difficulties in making friends. Even male adolescents who did not consider themselves isolated acknowledged that there were big gaps between them and their American peers culturally, so that they encountered obstacles preventing their belonging to peer groups at the dyadic or clique level. The Korean immigrant adolescents newly defined these current environments and situations as a different type of isolation. Therefore, this research regarded all participants as isolators according to their definition of isolation.

### 3. Information Need, Seeking and Use: Coping-Strategy with Daily Life Problem

Under the agreements that all study participants' status is isolated according to the results of the three surveys and intensive interview, the isolated Korean immigrant adolescents' information

practices were explored in their daily life setting. Some unique features were discovered their contextual backgrounds and motivations in information needs, seeking, and uses.

First, three main information needs of immigrant adolescents isolated from peers were found: Need 1—to learn English language skills to facilitate learning activities in school in the U.S.; Need 2—to learn social skills to facilitate making friends and to become accustomed to American culture and normative behaviors; Need 3—to learn study skills to facilitate academic success. These main three information needs are exactly aligned with the main reason why they immigrated to the U.S.

Second, even though the motivation of the immigration is their (the participants') better education, the decision to immigrate—the destination, dates, duration and formation of the immigration—were not made by themselves but imposed by their parents. These decision-making processes impacted their information practices for preparing for immigration in S. Korea: they were not directly involved in specific preparation activities, so that they did not enumerate specific concerns or information needs preparing for immigration in Korea. Moreover, such imposed decisions in regard to studying abroad and immigrating affected their dependence on their parents in selecting information sources or coping strategies, so that most information needs or source selection were mostly coached by their parents.

Third, isolated immigrant adolescents' information seeking and uses were mainly exercised in the school setting, even though the study was designed to explore participants' ELIS. Because participants' main motivation of immigration and the background of their information needs were to obtain a better education, including English skills and cultural experiences, their information needs and seeking were mainly related to school activities. It is contained in the purposive or imposed information-seeking practices within school settings, even though the study uses the conceptual framework of ELIS model to allow all possible conditions, situations, or contexts in participants' everyday information practices.

Fourth, to satisfy their main information needs, they used different coping strategies. To fulfill cognitive needs—Need 1 and Need 3, the participants usually sought parents, teachers and Internet sources. For their socio-affective needs—Need 2, they used guidance or counseling from their parents or selected passive coping strategies, such as the ignorance of their realities or information-avoiding.

Finally, in information-seeking processes, participants' dependence on parents was strong. Their

main information needs were fulfilled through the information sources their parents provided. However, because their parents were also newcomers in the U.S. and had little sense about the life of their new country, their parents relied on information sources from study-abroad brokers/agents in S. Korea and/or other parents who have similar aged children in Korean churches in the U.S. With the information that they earned from these third parties, they supplied the necessary information to their children.

#### 4. Satisfaction with Information Source and Perception of Information

In evaluating the information sources they used, first, they showed high satisfaction in fulfilling their cognitive needs, such as school assignments, college entrance exams, etc. But, for the information sources used for socio-affective needs, such as making American friends to release isolation, they did not show any satisfaction, yet sustained the use of the same coping strategies—asking parents, avoiding the information-seeking, or selecting alternation by engaging in different activities like computer gaming.

Second, the participants expressed ambivalence in using parents as an information source. Even though they relied on their parents very much, they showed both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the source—parents' guidance. Dissatisfaction with information from parents was not related to the content but rather with the way the information was delivered. In addition, socio-affective needs—to make friends and reduce their sense of isolation—were not satisfied in relying on their parents, yet they showed continuous reliance on and trust toward this information source. They continued to seek their parents' help because they thought that they could not find other better sources in their current conditions.

Third, the immigrant adolescents conceived of information (a) as something that can eliminate uncertainty, that supports decision-making, and that gives them benefit and utility; and (b) as a media/source itself, such as computers, books, the Internet, etc. Participants' subjective conception of information and the used information or information sources overall coincided. A conception of limited information sources—only the Internet and interpersonal sources—resulted in limited uses of information. If they could not find the necessary information from these two kinds of sources—their parents and the Internet, they easily gave up seeking other information sources and tried to ignore their current conditions.

Finally, no study participants regarded the library as a significant information source to satisfy their information needs, to help them with their decision-making, school activities, or to adjust to new surroundings. The library was limitedly perceived as a kind of place for three things—(a) reading/borrowing books for assignments, (b) using computers and (c) studying silently in the reading rooms—in their everyday life setting.

## V. Discussion: Emergent Themes from the Findings

The study analyzes the main themes that emerged from the findings and interprets the social phenomena of the emergent themes within potential conceptual frameworks. Five main emergent themes were analyzed and pertinent theories/models to interpret these features were suggested and discussed in detail.

### 1. Theme 1: Parent Attachment in Information-Seeking and Use.

The most consistent feature of prior adolescent information practices research in LIS has been the information source adolescents most frequently use and trust—peers. But the information source that these isolated Korean immigrant adolescents have sought most frequently is their parents—especially their mothers. All of the study participants regressively depended on their parents and showed strong emotional attachment to their mothers. It is possible to interpret the phenomenon of their attachment to their parents in two dimensions: psychological and socio-cultural approaches.

#### (1) Psychological Approach: Human Need for Security and Belongingness

Attachment to their parents—as the most trustful and reliable source—is possibly related to the seeking of a feeling of security (security need, the second lowest level in hierarchy of human needs), one of the most basic human needs (Maslow 1943). While Maslow’s theory of “hierarchy of needs” is not deeply analyzed here, he notes that people cannot seek higher level needs, such as autonomy or independence before basic needs—such as belonging and security—are satisfied. Insecurity and little sense of belonging due to isolation from peer groups in the new country may



be part of the reason why these adolescents turn to parents who are the most trusted (Schave and Schave 1989). In that sense, this unique phenomenon of the research—attachment to their parents—can be interpreted as a natural human behavior in unsecure and unstable life conditions. Their basic daily work that they could perform independently and easily in their home country—going to school, making close friends, and being involved in school activities—became current life burdens that they could not overcome without their parents' assistance in the new country. Moreover, their isolated conditions made them feel that their physical and emotional security was jeopardized. Accordingly, their attachment to their parents may reflect a human basic motivation to seek the information through the most secure and trustful people in odd and vulnerable surroundings.

## (2) Socio-cultural Approach: Family Oriented Korean Culture

In terms of the socio-cultural dimension, it is possible to interpret the phenomenon of dependence on parents as a cultural difference reflecting the closeness and bonds of Korean families. Confucianism should be understood in order to comprehend Korean behavior and the values to consider the family as the fundamental unit, which means that the family precedes an individual member (Min 2006). In that sense, their attachment to their parents in information practices, specifically regarding education, looks a very natural behavior in Korean society. In addition, all research participants acknowledged their parents' sacrifice for their education (e.g., family members' separation, financial investment, etc.) so that they tried to obey their parents' instructions, even though they are not satisfied with them as information sources—parents' instruction or guidelines—affectively.

## 2. Theme 2: Dependence on Interpersonal Information Sources

The study found that the isolated immigrant adolescents preferred interpersonal and informal sources (i.e., information collected when talking with parents or family members) to formal information sources/systems (i.e., libraries, books, etc.). Adolescents' parents also relied on interpersonal information sources shared by other parents with similar aged children. Two conceptual frameworks are possibly considered as potential theoretical lenses to explain the participants' and their parents' dependence on interpersonal sources: the Principle of Least Effort

under objectivism (Case 2005) and Information Poverty Theory under social constructionism (Tuominen and Savolainen 1997).

(1) Principle of Least Effort—General Human Nature to Seek the Least Work

Participants' and their parents' pursuit of interpersonal sources is a general phenomenon that people practice naturally. It is not a unique feature of isolated immigrant adolescents' information practices. Previous studies in LIS have used the Principle of Least Effort [PLE] to explain why people seek interpersonal sources as reflecting human preference for efficacy and convenience (e.g., Dickey, and Radford 2011; Lu 2007; Xu, Tan, and Yang 2006). In light of the premise of PLE, isolated immigrant adolescents tend to minimize the effort required to use necessary information; as a result, they tend to use the sources that they have easily used—informal and interpersonal information sources like their parents. However, considering that the immigrant adolescents' information environments have various and complex contexts and particular life conditions in the study findings, PLE seems to oversimplify isolated immigrant adolescents' specific context and dependence on interpersonal communication channels (Case 2005). According to the social constructionists' perspective, information practices occur in social contexts and involve multiple people so that individuals do not seek information in vacuum. Therefore, within the conceptual framework of 'information poverty', one of social constructive perspectives used to explain human information-seeking within impoverished socio-cultural contexts, the research tries to interpret the rationale of the second theme.

(2) Information Poverty: Limited Information Use through Insufficient and Limited Information Source/Pool

Isolated immigrant teens' dependence on informal information sources can possibly be interpreted as the outcome of information poverty by the use of limited communication channels within the same small ethnic communities. The phenomenon, one of the chronic problems in immigrants or minority societies, has been explained as information poverty in earlier studies of immigrants' information world in LIS (Chatman, 1996; Davis and Bath 2002; Fisher et al. 2004; Spink and Cole 2001). However, unlike other immigrant or minority social group members, the study participants are not physically and socio-economically poor or marginalized. Rather, they belong to high SES in both Korea and the U.S. Also, these Korean adolescents have been much

supported from their parents in various dimensions—especially in educational and economical supports.

Nevertheless, the information sources that they can use or have used have been insufficient and limited to interpersonal sources—information sharing by their oral communication based kinship networks. In addition, participants' parents are still newcomers in the new society. The linguistic and cultural difference or unfamiliarity often makes it difficult for these new resident to understand what authorities or qualification in their information use environments. The lack of knowledge about authentic and qualified formal information systems in the new country led these immigrants to rely on limited information sources “outside the mainstream of information world” (Chatman 1996). Moreover, some parents absolutely depended on the information from private study/immigration agents when continuing to pay expensive service fees because they thought that they had no experiences and correct information about American school systems. Private study agents or information brokers are not non-profit organization, so that the information they provide can be biased according to the agencies' profits or conditions. The quality of the information transmitted through interpersonal communication of ethnic communities, such as parents, is sometimes uneven, “leading to a trial-and-error approach to navigate local information systems, which is often costly and demoralizing” (Courtright 2005, 1). Immigrant adolescents' and their parents' reliance on informal interpersonal sources may intensify their impoverished conditions because of their limited and blocked formal communication channels because of socio-cultural or linguistic barriers in the new country (Harris and Dewdney 1994).

### 3. Theme 3: Information Ground—Church as Information Center.

In the adolescents' selection of information sources, it was found that the Korean churches, in particular, became the main and significant place in sharing information among parents—isolated adolescents' main information source. Information Ground (Pettigrew 1999) can be a good conceptual framework to explain these Korean parents' information acquisition from ethno-linguistic information gatekeepers and their interpersonal information sources via similar ethnic groups and a particular place (ethnic church). One of the traits of Information Ground is that social interaction is a primary activity such that information flow is a by-product. Within social activities, people engage in informal information sharing and sometimes obtain significant

information. Because of parents' active participation in activities in their Korean churches, the Korean church may be a significant Information Ground for parents who play the significant roles of information mediators and providers to supply the core information to their children. Earlier studies in LIS found that the phenomena of important information exchanges through ethno-linguistic information gatekeepers within immigrant communities, such as churches or market places and the role of ethnic churches as Information Ground (Fisher, Durrance, and Hinton 2004; Fisher et al. 2004; Metoyer-Duran 1993). The same phenomenon, information sharing in Information Ground, was also found in this study.

#### 4. Theme 4: Two-step Flow—Parents as Information Gatekeeper

Isolated immigrant adolescents acquired necessary information through their parents indirectly. In order to supply tailored information to their children, their parents used information via other interpersonal information mediators—other parent groups in Korean churches and/or commercial study-abroad agents/brokers in S. Korea. Namely, the information that the study participants used was filtered and reached, via a two or three-step flow, to isolated immigrant adolescents. The phenomenon can be explained by the 'two-step flow' theory well known in communication theory (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). In this theory, the role of information gatekeepers is critical in the information-sharing or source selection processes because they filter mass information earned from formal information channels and provide tailored information to the end-users—their family members or acquaintances.

However, in current information seeking or communication studies, scholars hesitate to apply this theory to explain current information-seeking and communication flows. Because the Internet powerfully became users' first and most preferred information source in the digital information environment, some empirical studies discovered that information seekers' first source is not the most accessible and credible people but the Internet (Case et al. 2004; Cline and Haynes 2001; Rutten, Squiers, and Hesse 2006). As a result, the Internet acts as a substitute of the gatekeepers' roles in the two-step flow. However, in the information world of isolated immigrant adolescents, the traditional model of two-step flow via interpersonal sources was still present. After filtering information from information mediators—parents or family members, isolated adolescents selected the necessary information from formal information sources.

## 5. Theme 5: Passive Information-Seeking, Information-Avoiding and Ignorance

In seeking information to fulfill their socio-affective information needs—to make friends to overcome their isolated and lonely conditions, isolated adolescents easily abandoned seeking information and negatively embraced their realities with low expectations for building friendship with peers. These phenomena can be interpreted in two theoretical perspectives: stress-coping theory and information poverty related limited information literacy skills.

### (1) Stress-Coping Theory: Information-Avoidance when Facing Uncontrollable Reality.

In dealing with daily life hassles, adolescents would not want to use information because they perceive information as useless or because they prefer other methods—ignoring their reality. Stress-coping theory in Psychology has explained why people may avoid information or passively seek information, even though their needs for information to overcome their negative and difficult situations is strong (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Under the big umbrella of coping theory, information seeking is regarded as one reaction among various coping strategies for dealing with life stresses and concerns. Various coping strategies can be divided into two styles: problem-focused vs. emotion-focused coping. The problem-focused coping strategy involves an attempt to solve, re-conceptualize, or minimize the effects of stressful situations. On the other hand, the emotion-focused coping emphasizes their affective conditions in stressful situations, thus defending themselves from the discomfort that they experience when seeking information (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Affectively vulnerable populations, such as isolated teens or cancer patients with chronic stresses, have a tendency to use emotion-focused coping strategies to protect themselves from negative realities (Reece and Bath 2001).

According to Causey and Dubow's study (1992), children are more likely to rely on problem-focused strategies to cope with school stressors (e.g., low academic achievement such as a poor grade on an exam), which they rated as more controllable than peer stressors (e.g., loneliness, peer-bullying), and are more likely to use avoidance strategies to cope with peer stressors. Therefore, the findings of this study explain isolated adolescents' tendency to give up seeking information or trying to find alternative ways to build peer-relationship for Need 2; rather than for Needs 1 and 3, which are related to cognitive needs. In terms of stress-coping, participants' information-avoidance is understood as one coping strategy and a defense mechanism

to protect individuals from stressful conditions and realities that they cannot control.

(2) Passive Information-Seeking by Limited Information Literacy Competencies

If information-seeking is accepted as a skill to cope with immigrant adolescents' current problems (and a skill which should be educated), it is possible to explain the causes of their passive information-seeking in the perspective of their limited information literacy skills. The study participants were not evaluated for information literacy skills with objective measurement scales, and the assessment is outside the scope of the study reported here. However, in light of the main characteristics of the information literates by *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (ACRL 2000)*, research participants seem to have limited literacy skills in categories to evaluate information sources and then select and use them effectively and efficiently. As evidence that the participants have little knowledge of information sources, they could not distinguish between information and information sources. They comprehended information-seeking as a using computer or the Internet. Accordingly, if they could not find out the necessary information from the Internet and their parents, they did not try to find out other possible information sources because they had limited knowledge regarding other kinds of reference or information sources. In addition, even after experiencing dissatisfaction with limited information sources, they responded to their information needs by rejecting the idea of looking for information alternatives or channels because of previous failed experiences and a lack of knowledge about alternative choices. They, finally, ignored their realities or gratified their current situations—loneliness and isolation—without trying to seek alternative solutions. It can be possibly interpreted that their current situation—their insufficient information literacy skills and low perception of the significance of information seeking—led them to seek information passively to use the same or limited information sources.

## VI. Conclusion

### 1. Contribution and Limitation of the Study

This research makes several important contributions to the understanding of information

practices for isolated immigrant adolescents. First, this study supplies rich qualitative data to describe isolated immigrant adolescents' information practices in their daily life context. Because there are few studies on immigrant adolescents' information practices in the field of LIS (Caidi, Allard, and Quirke 2010), this descriptive data sketching immigrant adolescents' information practices will lead to a better understanding of youth information practices and immigrants' information world in LIS. The strength of this study is not only in the volume of the data results acquired, but in detailed and contextual descriptions according to specifically different contexts and conditions in isolated immigrant adolescents' information practices in their peer-relationship.

Second, this study has methodological contributions in LIS. Even though this study focused mainly on qualitative method using in-depth interview in describing adolescents' information practices, the study tried to conduct mixed methods in using the quantitative method of using measurement scales to supplement intensive interviews. This approach helped to compensate for the limitation of interviews' dependence on participants' narration and the difficult situations related to describing verbal narration, such as abstract thought or emotion like isolation. Fidel (2008) pointed out that mixed methods research has rarely been used in LIS. She found that only 5 % of the LIS studies reported using a mixed method design. Yet, the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods—the uses of measurement surveys and in-depth interviews—allowed sketching a holistic picture of Korean immigrant adolescents' information practices within their isolated situations and particular social contexts.

Finally, this study has theoretical contributions in LIS. In interpreting the unique nature of isolated immigrant adolescents' information world, this study expands the existing theoretical frameworks or potential theories/models, as it modifies these existing models/theories for a better understanding of isolated immigrant youth's information world. Beyond the ELIS model, this study showed that there are previous models/theories to interpret the isolated immigrant youth information world, such as Information Poverty, Information Ground, Stress-Coping Theories, Human Motivation Theory, Principle of Least Effort, Two-step Flow, etc. In the middle of examining relevant theories/models to interpret the isolated immigrant adolescents' information world, it became obvious that existing theories/models and earlier studies do not correspond to the social phenomena of the study's findings. For instance, previous studies with similar population—immigrant family or their children—underlined the unique phenomena of role reversion between children and parents, and children's cultural brokers such as ICM [Immigrant Children Mediator]

(Chu 1999). ICM is one of well-known features in immigrant family's information environments to explain role reversions between parents and children because of immigrant parents' socio-cultural marginalization in the host country and their time lags in learning English. However, in this study, such phenomena were not found. Accordingly, to clarify these odd features in the study findings, the researcher needs to plan to explore the conditions of existing ICM within immigrant families' information world as a future study work.

Although this study developed a rich qualitative data to describe immigrant adolescents' ELIS, there are several limitations to this data. First, this study was conducted using a small sample due to the difficulty in identifying isolated immigrant adolescents who meet the criteria of the study, even though the study reached up the saturation point when recruiting study participants. While this study made it possible to test the feasibility of the research procedures and produced useful findings, further research is required that incorporates a larger sample as well as including immigrant adolescents who represent other ethnic backgrounds. This study focused only on Korean immigrants; therefore, it cannot be generalized to other immigrant populations. The idiosyncrasy of the particular sample of this study may limit the direct application of the research findings presented here to other similar population, educational contexts or information use environments. Thus, while the findings from this study are valuable, applying the findings to other similar population or isolated students within different contexts requires special caution.

Second, the themes that emerged as a result of the analysis do not exactly correspond to the initial research goals or intentions. For instance, this study did not, at first, limit itself to exploring adolescents' information-seeking in the school settings (or educational purposes) but rather in daily life environments. But, study participants' main information needs are focused on their academic achievements in new schools, so that their information use environments and information-seeking activities were mainly held in their school or educational fields. In addition, gender difference in interpreting isolated contexts and lonely situations were not anticipated. Thus, participants' equal recruitments by gender in the sample were not designed in order to compare the differences by gender in information-seeking and perception of the isolation. Furthermore, in this study, the absence of immigrant children's role as cultural brokers such as ICM was not expected. In order to analyze the causes of such social phenomena, stratified samplings for recruiting the subjects with various SES within the same ethnic groups were not applied.

Yet, these unexpected social phenomena were discovered and described in this study. This is



typical in a qualitative study that employs a grounded theory approach, which is a bottom-up approach to develop a middle-range theory based on the themes as they emerge directly out of the data collected (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Although the emergent themes do not directly respond to the research or the expected research questions/categories, they do provide important clues to understand the specific population's—isolated Korean immigrant adolescents'—information world within specific contexts.

## 2. Future Work

To supplement the limitation of this study and to interpret the emergent unique phenomena, future studies are suggested. First, future studies need to focus on understanding why immigrant youth seek particular types of information in special contexts utilizing a variety of research methods, such as longitudinal or comparative approaches. For instance, in the case of adolescents' attachment to their mother, further research can diagnose the degree of attachment by using attachment measurement scales. Such study could also determine the extent to which this behavior is normal or abnormal. Even though immigrant adolescents demonstrate normal attachment to their parents, if they still depend on their parents as main information sources, the research will be able to focus on their social affects or to find relevant theories to interpret the reasons behind this distinctive behavior.

Second, it is required to conduct both longitudinal and comparative studies in various populations and cases, such as different ethnic groups, age groups, and cross-cultural studies. Further studies on basis of the findings of this study will be required to conduct comparative studies of different ethnic groups—Asians vs. Europeans, collectivistic cultures vs. individualistic cultures—as well as stratified groups by different family structures, SES, gender or age groups. These trials will allow to explain the causes of the unique features of isolated adolescents' information behaviors (e.g., strong dependence on parents—mother, ignorance of real information needs, gender difference in interpreting isolation, absence of ICM, etc.) more holistically throughout comparing various and different environments and cases. Ultimately, these long-term studies can develop theories to interpret isolated teens, as well as their information practices and information worlds.

Third, it is required to explore the variables important to assess the credibility or trustworthiness

of teens' preferred information sources. Previous studies in LIS discovered that immigrant adolescents do usually not use information sources if they do not receive any clues about trustworthiness based on personal intimacy, even though the sources may contain useful and precise information. Thus, almost all teens usually gain necessary information from close friends rather than teachers or parents. However, immigrant adolescents, isolated from peers in this study, usually considered their parents as the most valuable and trustworthy information source, even though their parents are among the information poor due to their unfamiliarity in social norms or systems in their new home country. Therefore, as another future research agenda, it is suggested exploring the factors that influence the perceived trustworthiness of information sources among adolescents.

Finally, what is learned from the isolated immigrant adolescents in this research should be applied to explore general (non-immigrant) newcomers' information seeking and acculturation in new schools. This research will enable the development of conceptual and theoretical frameworks to explain the key characteristics of information practices for the assimilation/adjustment in a new society: normative behavior, information behavior, cultural behavior, etc. Furthermore, the findings in this study need to be applied to general newcomers' adaptation and acculturation in various types of organizations beyond the school settings. Hence, these future study agenda can contribute to the development of pertinent theories to explore the meaning of information practices in newcomers' assimilating processes in new environments. Conclusively, these studies and research agenda can contribute new theories and premises to design and cultivate the best information use environments for isolated and newly arrived young people in various organizations and contexts.

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