

**Interracial Contact Experience during
Recreational Basketball and Soccer**
Korean American Males' Perspectives

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Abstract

This study employed intergroup contact hypothesis to investigate Korean Americans' interracial contact experiences within the context of recreational sports. Interviews with 15 Korean American males revealed that they held various perceptions toward the presence of contact hypothesis' optimal conditions. Their perceptions were largely influenced by six key factors: (1) skill level of participants, (2) racial stereotypes, (3) physical attributes of participants, (4) language proficiency, (5) play climate or culture within recreational sport settings, and (6) longevity of contact. Although most informants believed that interracial contact during recreational sports contributes to harmonious interracial relations, they also felt that optimal conditions need not be present for positive interracial contact to occur.

KEYWORDS: Interracial contact, recreational sports, Korean Americans, skill levels

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When guys like Liu [an Asian American recreational basketball player] walk into a gym, eyes often move past them, and black and white players of similar height and build get picked before them. Then other teams start trying fancy behind-the-back passes and going for every steal, Asian Americans can tell the competition isn't taking them seriously. (Gregory, 2012, p. 45)

The history of the United States has been marked by acute racial conflict since its inception. It has undergone intense bloodshed, including lynching, riots, and hate crimes, due to racism and racial hostility (Feagin & Feagin, 2008; Jaspin, 2007; Perry, 2001). Although the enactment of civil rights legislation in 1964 was a significant turning point for improving racial relations in the U.S., racial hostility persists and threatens social harmony (Feagin, 2001; 2006). For social scientists, finding ways to eradicate or alleviate racial discord and prejudice has been the subject of decades of social science inquiry.

One of the most influential approaches to reducing intergroup conflict was proposed by Allport (1954). He posited that the best way to alleviate conflict and hostility between different groups is to place them in contact with each other under four specific conditions: (1) equal status of participants, (2) achievement of common goals, (3) cooperative interaction, and (4) support of authorities. Since the contact hypothesis was introduced, intergroup contact has been believed to be one of the most effective strategies for improving intergroup relations (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Pettigrew, 1998).

Some researchers believe that intergroup contact within organized sports is particularly helpful for facilitating intergroup harmony because the context tends to satisfy the four optimal conditions (Brown, Brown, Jackson, Sellers, & Manuel, 2003; Slavin, 1985; Slavin & Madden, 1979). For example, Brown et al. (2003) argued that athletes have equal status in sport settings because they can be ranked on the basis of their skills as opposed to skin color. Athletes also pursue victory as a common goal and cooperate to achieve this end. Moreover, team coaches occupy significant authoritative roles and (often) foster an environment of inclusion.

In contrast, other researchers assert that organized athletics do not automatically fulfill the optimal conditions (Chu & Griffey, 1985; Miracle, 1981; McClen-don & Eitzen, 1975; Rees & Miracle, 1984; Rees & Segal, 1984; Thirer & Wieczorek, 1984). For instance, Rees and Segal (1984) stressed that equal status among athletes is not met because a coach's assessment of athletes' performance creates a status hierarchy within a team. Athletes compete not only with opposing teams but also with teammates to acquire more playing time which ascribes a higher status to starting players than substitute players.

Although researchers have presented mixed opinions about the existence of optimal conditions in athletic team settings, extant studies contain several limitations. First, researchers have focused only on organized athletic teams and have not tested the contact hypothesis in *recreational sport settings*.¹ Unlike organized

¹Based on the definition proposed by Edwards (1973) and Woods (2006), we defined recreational sport as sport activity that people voluntarily participate during their leisure time for intrinsic rewards such as refreshment of body and mind, fun, and fitness. In contrast to organized sport, recreational sports are informal and participants are not motivated to obtain extrinsic rewards such as money, fame, and professional careers.

athletics, participation in recreational sport is voluntary and participants are less likely to compete against their teammates to obtain more playing time. Moreover, the recreational sport context does not have coaches or authoritative figures that evaluate participants' skills. Thus, there is the potential for greater equality among participants in recreational sports compared to organized athletics. Second, in past studies of organized sports, the existence of the four optimal conditions has not been examined from the *point of view of participants*. Researchers presumed the optimal conditions were present or not present. Researchers have argued that it is important to understand whether or not participants themselves believe the four optimal conditions are being met (Cohen, 1982; Cohen & Lotan, 1995; Riordan & Ruggiero, 1980). Third, previous studies investigated contact between Whites and African Americans. *Other people of color* have been the topic of few contact studies. This is important because the outcome of contact is expected to vary across different groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; 2006). Moreover, given the rapid growth of other minority populations in the U.S., intergroup contact studies are considerably outdated. Finally, research on contact hypothesis' applicability in sport settings has not been updated since the 1980s. Although Allport's contact hypothesis has evolved dramatically over the past three decades, it has not been applied to sport settings during this time. For all these reasons, an updated study of contact hypothesis in a recreational sport's context is needed.

In this study, we investigate Korean Americans' interracial contact experiences during recreational sport activities and examine the extent to which participants believe optimal conditions for positive interracial contact exist. This study also aims to go beyond the existence of the optimal conditions and explore other factors that might foster or stymie positive interracial contact experiences. While several researchers have documented that leisure spaces are usually racially demarcated and few interracial contacts actually occur within leisure spaces (Floyd & Shinew, 1999; Gobster, 2002), recreational team sports, such as pickup basketball and soccer, produce racially mixed teams and opportunities for interracial contact because teammates are often randomly assigned and change frequently. Given the focus of our inquiry, we expect to shed fresh light on the intergroup contact scholarship and also enrich our knowledge on Korean Americans' leisure experiences. The research questions that frame this study were (1) Do Korean Americans perceive the presence of the optimal conditions when they participate in recreational sports within racially mixed teams? (2) Other than the optimal conditions, what factors, if any, foster or inhibit Korean Americans' positive interracial contact experience in recreational sports? and (3) Do Korean Americans believe that recreational sports contribute to harmonious racial relationship?

Literature Review

Intergroup Contact Hypothesis

The intergroup contact hypothesis was initiated by Gordon Allport (1954).² In his book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Allport hypothesized that one of the most effective ways to alleviate conflict, hostility, and prejudice between groups is to place them in contact with each other. To maximize the effect of intergroup contact, Allport hypothesized that four conditions needed to be satisfied. First, groups should have equal status during the contact situation. Although equal status condition was not precisely defined by Allport, it has been accepted that individuals from disparate groups should have similar status and power and must not be in a position to dominate or exercise authority over the other (Farley, 1999; Riordan, 1978). While some researchers presumed the existence of this condition by simply matching some demographic or socioeconomic characteristics of two groups, it is more important to assure that participating individuals themselves actually perceive equal status in contact situations (Cohen, 1982; Riordan & Ruggiero, 1980). Second, groups must share a common goal that they both strive to achieve. Third, both groups have to cooperate with each other to accomplish shared goals. Finally, authorities, law, or customs need to establish norms or an environment which encourages intergroup contact. Researchers have embraced these four optimal conditions as contextual prerequisites for positive intergroup contact experiences (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Pettigrew, 1998).

Allport's ideas have inspired numerous contact studies over the past half-century. The contact hypothesis has been tested extensively within various social settings such as the military (Amir, Bizman, & Rivner, 1973), schools (Amir, Sharan, Rivner, Ben-ari, & Bizman, 1979; Feitelson, Weintraub, & Michaeli, 1972; McGlothlin & Killen, 2006; McGlothlin, Killen, & Edmonds, 2005; Odell, Korgen, & Wang, 2005; Pettigrew, 1969; Schofield, 1986), occupational settings (Harding & Hogrefe, 1952; Katz, Goldston, & Benjamin, 1958), community gardens (Shinew, Glover, & Parry, 2004), and even tourism destinations (Amir & Ben-Ari, 1985).

Multiple studies have critically reviewed Allport's contact hypothesis and spurred its reformulation. Two significant changes are worth highlighting. First, researchers identified friendship opportunities as a fifth optimal condition (Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Jackman & Crane, 1986; Pettigrew, 1997). Pettigrew (1998) noted, "contact situation must provide the participants with the opportunity to become friends" (p. 76). Since contact situations entailing friendship tend to ensure self-disclosure and intimacy, some researchers have argued that fulfilling this condition is more effective for reducing intergroup prejudice than satisfying the original four optimal conditions (Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Jackman & Crane,

²Although some researchers use the terms *contact hypothesis* and *contact theory* interchangeably, Allport's original idea cannot be considered a theory because it failed to specify how the positive effect of intergroup contact can be extended to other social contexts or entire group members who are not engaged in contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). However, Allport's contact hypothesis has been developed and expanded by numerous other researchers and evolved into intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998). To avoid any misunderstanding, we used the term *hypothesis* throughout this manuscript.

1986; Pettigrew, 1997). Second, the four optimal conditions were found to be facilitators for positive interracial contact experience rather than prerequisites. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2000, 2006) meta-analysis study found that intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice regardless of the fulfillment or absence of one or more conditions. While previous studies heavily emphasized the existence of the original four optimal conditions, Pettigrew and Tropp argued that researchers should extend their focus beyond the original four conditions and examine other factors that promote or curb contact's ability to reduce prejudice.

Intergroup Contacts within Sport Settings

Sport is commonly accepted as a means of social integration in American culture and thought to ameliorate discordant interracial relations (Hartmann, 2000; Hough, 2008; Lapchick, 2003). Some research has confirmed this idea. For example, Slavin and Madden (1979) reported that high school students who participated in racially heterogeneous sport teams had more positive racial attitudes toward people outside of their own racial background than students who were not involved in sport activities. Similarly, Brown et al. (2003) investigated White student athletes' contact with Black student athletes and reported that White athletes who had frequent contact with Black teammates expressed more favorable attitudes toward Blacks than those who had less contact.

However, other researchers proposed sharply contrasting opinions and rejected the notion of sport as an ideal context for interracial contact. For instance, McClendon and Eitzen (1975) investigated the relationship between sports teams' winning and athletes' anti-Black and anti-White attitudes. They found no relationship between winning and favorable attitude changes and suggested that it is naïve to assume sports settings facilitate harmonious interracial relations. Similarly, Miracle's (1981) longitudinal study on interracial contact among high school athletes found that interracial contact in sport settings did not significantly improve athletes' racial relationships. Although the context of high school football teams encouraged Black and White students to cooperate and helped resolve intergroup conflict, Miracle found those contacts were limited to the athletic context and did not spillover to non-sport settings. Chu and Griffey (1985) reached a similar conclusion in their study of interracial contact experience of high school athletes and non-athletes. They compared several attitudinal (e.g., how one perceives different racial groups) and behavioral (e.g., how one interacts with different racial groups) conditions of the two groups and found a negligible difference between them. They concluded that interracial contact in sport settings does not make a significant impact in participants' racial attitudes and behavior.

Rees and Miracle (1984) put forward several reasons why interracial contact within sport settings does not positively change racial attitudes. First, equal status among organized sport participants is not guaranteed because different racial groups often come from different social environments, learn sports skills under different conditions, and possess different styles of play. Second, cooperation does not take place if Black or White players hold positions that do not require much dependency on other players. Third, authority support may be superseded by local customs that discourage interracial interaction. Finally, failure in achieving a common goal (i.e., losing) may cause frustration and possible scapegoating. In a simi-

lar vein, Rees and Segal (1984) stated that evaluations from coaches on athletes' performances create status hierarchies within teams such that starting players derive a higher status than substitute players. Thus, organized team sport settings may not satisfy the condition of equal status among participants.

Although researchers have presented sharply contrasting opinions about whether sport settings satisfy Allport's optimal conditions, this line of inquiry has been virtually extinct since the 1980s. Given the hypothesis' significant development and dramatic changes in the racial composition of the U.S. over the past three decades, the literature is markedly outdated and interracial contact experiences within sports activities need to be reexamined.

Recreational Sport Settings

If a status hierarchy and competition among teammates undermine equal status among athletes and make organized sports an undesirable locale for interracial contact, what happens in sport settings that are more informal in nature? In recreational sports, neither competition with teammates for starting positions nor the evaluation from coaches exists. Thus, there is a potential that equal status among individuals is more likely in recreational sport settings than they are in organized athletics.

The effects of interracial contact in recreational sport settings have been the subject of only a few studies. To our knowledge, Krouwel, Boonstra, Duyvendak, and Veldboer's (2006) research on recreational soccer games between racially homogeneous teams is the first of its kind to incorporate the contact hypothesis. They examined the characteristics of interracial contact during soccer games and identified frequent verbal insults, physical violence, and strong antagonism between opposing team members. They concluded that "[t]he contact-hypothesis, seemingly so adequate for sport, is in fact naïve with regard to leisure time activities" (p. 176). However, their conclusion is based solely on a recreational sport context where two racially homogeneous teams competed against each other. Krouwel et al. failed to provide any evidence of cooperation between players of different races even though cooperation is one of the key components of intergroup contact hypothesis. Importantly, researchers have noted that competition between different groups for desired resources (winning) can exacerbate conflict and hostility between groups (Aronson, 1999; Sherif, 1966; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1988; Sherif, 1989). To better understand the effect of intergroup contact within recreational sport, we need to investigate recreational sports involving racially mixed teams.

Korean Americans

The history of Korean immigration to the United States has spanned more than a century. Koreans were pushed to the United States due to Korea's political upheaval, economic corruption, and Japanese colonization and also pulled by the demanded labor force at sugar plantations in Hawaii (Kim, 2004). Since the first 102 Korean immigrants came to the U.S. in 1903, the number of Korean immigrants increased significantly. From 1970 to 2007, the number of Korean immigrants grew approximately 250% and made them the seventh largest immigrant group in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2009). As of 2009, approxi-

mately 1.6 million Korean Americans live in the United States, which constitutes the fifth largest Asian American population in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2011).

Despite this remarkable increase of Korean population in the U.S., limited research has investigated their interracial contact experiences during leisure activity. Historically, most interracial contact studies have examined the contact between Black and White Americans. For their part, leisure scholars have focused on Korean Americans' leisure constraints or acculturation to American culture (e.g., Kim, Scott, & Oh, 2005; Scott, Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2006; Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004) and paid little attention to their interracial contact experiences during leisure pursuits. As noted above, this study will extend our understanding of the effects of interracial contact and Korean Americans' leisure experience.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research method using a symbolic interactionism approach (Blumer, 1969/1986; Denzin, 2007). Symbolic interactionism focuses on social interactions among individuals and emphasizes the contextualized nature of human experience. It posits that individuals derive meaning of objects or social situations through their interactions with others and they act upon those meanings. Leisure researchers have identified that qualitative methods and symbolic interactionism are particularly effective for capturing lived experience of individuals and understanding complexity of the leisure phenomenon under investigation (Henderson, 1991; Samdahl, 1988; Scott & Godbey, 1990). Given the need to describe and analyze the nuances of Korean Americans' perception toward their interracial contact during recreational sports and provide detailed descriptions about such leisure experience, qualitative inquiry with symbolic interactionism is considered as a suitable methodological approach. Moreover, due to the paucity of research that dealt with Korean Americans' interracial contact experience during recreational sports, qualitative method is appropriate for our exploratory research (Creswell, 2007).

Sampling Strategy

We used a purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) to recruit Korean Americans who participated or have been participating in recreational team sports that were racially mixed. Korean Americans were defined as Korean immigrants who came from Korea to live permanently in the United States. This includes second or subsequent generation Koreans who were born in the United States. It also includes Korean international students who intend to permanently live in the United States upon completion of their academic program. We sought to interview Korean Americans who possessed multiple years of recreational sports experience with other racial groups in order to obtain data on their interracial contact experiences. Informants were identified primarily through the recommendations of two key gatekeepers who were members of Korean amateur basketball teams and soccer teams at two southern universities. We first contacted potential informants by telephone calls and e-mail, explained the nature of research, and requested their participation. Although we intended to interview both female and male informants, our snowball sampling strategy failed to recruit a single female Korean

American. A total of 15 Korean American males were recruited. Ten informants were born in Korea, and the others were born in the U.S. Eleven informants played basketball as their primary recreation activity, while the other four played soccer. Informants' ages ranged from 19 to 36 years and their length of residency in the U.S. ranged from 3 to 32 years. All informants were either enrolled in a college or had at least a bachelor's degree. Table 1 provides an overview of the 15 study informants who participated in the study.³

Table 1

Characteristics of Participants

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- I-1. Peter—22 years old; college student; born and lived in the U.S. his whole life; played football in junior high school; enjoys both basketball and soccer but mainly soccer; involved in Korean soccer club.
- I-2. David—20 years old; college student; born in the U.S.; lived in Korea for seven years; plays soccer approximately twice a week with a racially diverse group of people; involved in a city league soccer team; started playing soccer in the 5th grade.
- I-3. Jake—21 years old; college student; born in the U.S.; lived in Korea for seven years; enjoyed playing track, tennis, basketball, soccer, and tennis in high school; favorite sport is soccer and started playing seriously three years ago; involved in a Korean soccer club; participates in intramural soccer league with his high school friends who are racially diverse.
- I-4. John—29 years old; college student; married; born in Korea and came to the U.S. when he was seven years old; has lived in many different states; used to be on a track team when he was attending middle school in Korea; a former state champion wrestler; used to play both soccer and basketball for his high school; involved in a Korean soccer club.
- I-5. Woosung—19 years old; college student; born in Korea; came to the U.S. when he was 12 years old; started playing basketball after he arrived in the U.S.; lived in racially diverse neighborhood where few Asians lived; majority of his friends are not Asians; involved in a Korean basketball club.
- I-6. Jeehun—30 years old; business owner; married; born in Korea; came to the U.S. when he was four years old; possesses a strong passion for basketball and golf; grew up in African American neighborhood and used to play basketball only with African Americans; used to play and practice basketball almost every day when he was a college student; involved in a Korean basketball club.

³The same table can be found in a related article published by the authors.

Table 1 (cont.)

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- I-7. Minsoo—24 years old; college student; born in Korea, lived in Argentina and Mexico before he came to the U.S.; lived in the U.S. for four years; involved in a Korean basketball club.
- I-8. Edward—20 years old; college student; born in Korea, lived in the U.S. for four years; enjoys both soccer and basketball; plays soccer with racially diverse group of people; involved in a Korean basketball club.
- I-9. Taehyon—33 years old; graduate student; single; born in Korea, came to the U.S. to four years ago; started to play basketball when was a high school student; possesses strong passion for basketball; the leader of a Korean basketball club.
- I-10. Bob—20 years old; college student; born in Korea; came to the U.S. when he was 13 years old; used to play basketball almost every night before he got a back injury; involved in a Korean basketball club.
- I-11. Chulsoo—31 years old; graduate student; born in Korea; came to the U.S. when he was 24 years old; enjoys basketball; a founding member of a Korean basketball club.
- I-12. Taewon—33 years old; graduate student; married; born in Korea; came to the U.S. when he was 28 years old; enjoys basketball; involved in Korean basketball club; prefers to play basketball with his Korean friends.
- I-13. Harrison—36 years old; professional; single; born in Korea; moved to the U.S. when he was four years old; used to play basketball but stopped playing due to busy schedule from his job.
- I-14. Daniel—20 years old; college student; born in the U.S. and has stayed in the U.S. for 5 years; plays basketball.
- I-15. Josh—20 years old; college student; born and lived in the U.S. his whole life; plays tennis and basketball.
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Note. All names are pseudonyms

Data Generation Procedures

We conducted in-depth and semistructured interviews from August to September 2008. The interview questions were developed based on McCracken's (1988) suggestions. First, the primary author asked informants' demographic information and recreational sports participation patterns to identify interviewees' contextual information and backgrounds (e.g., how long have you lived in the United States?

How long have you been participating in your sport activity?). Second, the primary author asked interviewees' perceptions and feelings toward the presence of the optimal conditions during their interracial contact experience at pickup basketball or soccer games. For example, we asked informants to recall their recreational sport experience with racially mixed teams, and situations in which their team and the opponent's team were racially mixed. We then asked about whether or not they felt equal status existed among participants in racially mixed teams. Respondents were also asked about whether or not they had developed friendships with people outside of their own race through recreational sport. Finally, interviewees were asked their opinions about whether or not recreational sports can contribute to harmonious interracial relations. In this case, we asked informants, "Do you think recreational sport activity helps different groups of people to get along together?" This interview format helped us to develop some degree of rapport with the interviewees at the beginning of the interviews and helped us obtain rich data needed for penetrating qualitative analysis without violating informants' privacy (McCracken, 1988).

All interviews were audio recorded to provide a full account of the interview process and outcomes. Since the first author's native language is Korean, and he is fluent in English, the interviews were conducted in English, Korean, or a mix of both languages according to interviewees' preferences. Interviews averaged an hour in length, but a few interviews lasted almost two hours. Interviews were conducted at the primary author's house, his office, and local coffee shops around two universities. Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed into English. While transcribing the interview data, we recognized a need for additional interviews to clarify certain themes and obtain more details about informants' statements. Thus, we conducted follow-up interviews with four informants over the telephone. Each follow-up interview lasted approximately 40 minutes.

Data Analysis

We employed Colaizzi's (1978) five-step data analysis method. First, we read through all interview transcripts several times to become familiar with the overall sense of data. Second, significant statements, meaning "the phrases or sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomenon," were extracted from the transcripts (p. 59). Each significant statement was entered onto white index cards. Third, we spelled out the meanings embedded in the significant statements, entered each meaning onto blue index cards, coded each card with the designation of interview location, characteristic of interviewee, and particular events during interview, and placed above the white index cards from which the meanings were extracted. Fourth, we formulated meanings into clusters of themes, and they were compared to original transcripts in order to validate them. Finally, the themes were integrated into an exhaustive description of the investigated topics.

Trustworthiness

We employed several techniques to enhance the trustworthiness of our data and credibility of findings. First, the primary author employed a number of tactics that ensured honesty among participants (Bernard, 2000; Jones, 1996; Shenton, 2004). For example, he asked open-ended and nonjudgmental questions, empha-

sized that there were no right or wrong answers to interview questions, and encouraged interviewees to be frank. To quickly establish rapport with the interviewees and ensure accuracy of data, he also provided honest answers to interviewees' questions about his background and recreational sport experiences with mixed racial groups and informed them that he was also a Korean immigrant sport player. In addition, he used some probing techniques, such as nodding the head, "uh-huh" probe, and "tell-me-more" probe to encourage the interviewees to talk freely (Bernard, 2000). Second, we conducted member checking once all interviews were completed and transcribed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, the primary author analyzed his own experience and bias about recreational sports with other racial groups prior to interviews.

Since the first author was responsible for data collection and analysis and the researcher is the primary instrument for qualitative inquiry, it was important for him to be fully aware of his preconceived ideas about the phenomenon under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Based on Ahern's (1999) suggestions, the first author reflected on his past experience and analyzed his belief systems. This self-examination process made him acknowledge his longstanding interest in recreational sports, particularly his 14-year basketball career. He played basketball at various locations with diverse groups of people and has observed markedly different consequences from such experience. Although playing basketball with different racial groups sometimes created the opportunities for intergroup socializations and friendships, it also caused serious tension manifested in verbal insults and even physical aggression. This experience made him believe that sport activity is not always helpful for establishing harmonious intergroup relations and led him to inquire into specific conditions or factors that produce varying outcomes from sport activity. Through this self-examination, the primary author was able to maintain a keen and deep insight toward interracial contact experience throughout the research process (McCracken, 1988).

Findings

Two predominant themes emerged from the data analysis. First, informants varied greatly in their assessment of the existence of the original four optimal conditions in racially mixed recreational sport settings, yet they all strongly agreed friendship opportunities were present in these settings. We identified six key factors that shaped informants' varying perspectives. They were (1) skill level of participants, (2) racial stereotypes, (3) physical attributes, (4) language proficiency, (5) play climate or culture within different recreational sport settings, and (6) longevity of contact. Second, although all informants felt that participating in recreational sports with other racial/ethnic groups facilitated racial harmony, some informants' did not actually experience positive effects of interracial contact.

Diverse Perceptions on Five Optimal Conditions

Equal status among participants. Informants were divided into two groups according to their perceptions on the presence of equal status in recreational sport settings. One group of informants did not believe equal status existed in recreational sport because of what they perceived as a status hierarchy based on

participants' *skill levels*. They believed that skilled players occupied higher status in recreational sports while unskilled players held low status. They also stated that racial stereotypes, perceived physical attributes, and longevity of contact significantly influenced how participants viewed players' skill levels. Jeehun and Harrison explained the relationship between racial stereotypes and skill levels:

Jeehun: Unfortunately, Asian Americans are always starting towards the bottom. In basketball, you see Black athletes, you presume they are better than you or better than most. You see Asians, you presume they are probably not as good [as Blacks]. You see Whites or Hispanics, you say, yeah, they [are] probably somewhere in between.

Harrison: Maybe it is not equal . . . [because] people perceive Asians [as] not athletic. So your participation should be based on your level of how good you are. But someone already has a mindset of Asian people [as] not athletic. Maybe that's a disadvantage even though they don't know your actual basketball skills . . . I think [once] people play and get to see that [actual skill], people realize that the guy is pretty good. But the initial feeling is, he is not that good because he is an Asian.

Chulsoo further described how pickup basketball participants evaluated other players' skill levels based on race, particularly in situations when participants choose teammates:

When I consider race, Blacks and Whites get picked first and Asians are usually the last . . . In the perspective of equality, if we say height and all the physical conditions are the same among different people, I can tell you that people prefer Blacks or Whites more than Asians for their teammates.

The above excerpts suggest that participants impute status in recreational sports on the basis of race and ethnicity. Within recreational basketball, informants felt Asians were regarded as least competitive and skilled, whereas African Americans were believed to be "genetically" or "naturally fast and strong" and "good at sports" compared to other racial groups. Similarly, Peter commented that Hispanics were generally considered superior soccer players compared to other ethnic and racial groups. He stated that having Hispanics on an opposing team made him "automatically think" that he would have "a hard game" whereas having Hispanics in his team created an expectation that his team would "do good" and "have a chance to win." In sum, racial stereotypes seemed to be deeply embedded among recreational sport participants in regard to how they viewed players' skills or status.

Players' physical attributes were another factor that influenced informants' perceptions of players' skills. Harrison illustrated this point as follows:

It's just an instinct. You have to judge somebody that you've never known, you've never met . . . You can only judge someone based on his physical attributes. [If] this guy is tall and has big muscles . . . you would probably pick him before the short guy [even though he might be a bad basketball player] . . . I think those physical attributes probably outweigh the racial

[background], as far as the sport goes. If there is a tall, muscular Asian guy and a short White guy, you will still pick the Asian guy because it looks like he can play better.

Harrison commented that participants tended to believe a tall and muscular person to be a better basketball player than a small and skinny person. Thus, these Korean Americans believed that recreational sport participants differentiate individuals' skill level and status according to racial background and obvious physical attributes.

Nevertheless, informants also stressed that the significance of race and physical attributes is limited to situations where participants do not know each other and have not spent much time playing sports together. They stated that longevity of contact was imperative for informants to adequately gauge other players' actual skill level. Chulsoo described how this dynamic process took place at a pickup basketball court:

If you have the physicality [that is taller and bigger than the others], you will get many passes at the beginning. But then, after a while, we start to realize actual ability and characteristics of other players. Something like, "Oh, this guy is a little bit selfish and doesn't pass the ball" or "What is he doing? He is tall but he is not [a good basketball player]." Then we don't pass to that guy. So appearance is important only at the beginning. It's eventually all about the *actual skill level* [emphasis added].

Jeehun also commented that race is not an ultimate indicator of one's skill level and status:

You have to prove yourself. People are not set on those [racial stereotypes]. If you prove yourself, if you prove that you are good enough, then they'll treat you and give you the respect that you deserved in terms of that. You know when I was playing a lot more actively I almost exclusively play on the, what we called "the black court [a court occupied predominantly by African Americans]." There I was an average to better average player . . . but I could definitely hold my own and I wasn't considered as the guy who shouldn't be on the team or anything like that.

Chulsoo and Jeehun suggested that people do not assess other players' skills solely based on race or physicality. These attributes were only important when participants were strangers to each other, and the salience of the two factors gradually disappeared as participants had repeated interactions and recognized each other's real capabilities. Ultimately, actual skill level became the most important factors shaping a player's status.

While many informants believed recreational sport settings did not automatically satisfy equal status, other informants believed equal status existed for two reasons. First, they considered unequal skill levels among participants as an inevitable and legitimate aspect of sport activities. Minsoo stated,

No, I don't think [the difference in skill levels] is something [which] disturbs the equality. It is a common thing that [a] good player receives more

passes than other players. In every sport, people tend to rely on the best player in their team A good player usually holds the ball most of the time. Five people do not equally occupy the ball even if five players play together. We can't say this is something [that] disturbs equality because it always happens in basketball both in amateur and professional If you accept this kind of uneven ball circulation as a common thing, then I think nothing disturbs the equality in basketball.

Minsoo explained that different skill level among participants does not necessarily mean equality is absent in recreational sport context. He insisted that different skill level is a taken for granted facet of sport and rejected the idea of a status hierarchy based on skill levels.

Equal opportunity was a second reason why some informants believed equal status permeated recreational sports. Taewon felt that recreational sport facilities were accessible regardless of one's racial background or nationality. Thus, he believed that he could go to any recreational facility and "nobody would bar [his] participation in basketball simply because [he] is not a White but Asian."

Common goals. Informants provided two contrasting views toward the presence of common goals. The majority of informants believed that recreational sport participants shared two common goals: winning and having fun. Bob articulated why winning is a common goal among recreational sport participants:

I mean when you play sport, our goal is to win. I think everybody else's goal is to win also. You don't play sports to lose. I think our common goal is to win. Maybe there are some people really want to win by a lot of point difference but then, we are more like just win.

Consistent with extant literature (McClendon & Eitzen, 1975; Miracle, 1981), Bob mentioned that winning is a goal that all participants strive to accomplish in recreational sport settings.

Edward explained how the nature of team sports contributes to participants' perception of winning as their common goal. He stated that "sport is competition" and it has "a dynamic that divides the people into winners and losers." Edward implied that the innate competition nature in team sport structure endows participants' winning as an overarching goal, and winning outweighs any initial motives of participants once they actually engage in the activity. Edward's point was echoed by other informants. They indicated that participants made efforts to win the games simply because winning provides more satisfaction and pleasure than losing. They stated that "You don't play sports to lose," "It's never a good feeling to be on a losing team," and "You will have fun when you win but no fun if you lose."

Having fun was identified as another common goal. John stated that recreational soccer "is not like a professional field," so he thinks that having fun is equally important goal as winning in recreational sports. He suggested that having fun may be limited to recreational sport contexts because there is less emphasis on winning compared to organized sports.

Some informants stressed that winning and having fun are two different goals even though both goals are deeply interrelated and enjoyment obtained from recreational sports heavily depends on winning games. Chulsoo stated,

One day, I went to play basketball by myself and I played with really good players. We won every game because my teammates were so good, but I didn't have many chances to touch the ball because my skill level was too low compared to others. So it was, of course winning gave me a good feeling but, I felt like, I was not even in the team . . . Although we shared the winning as a common goal at that time, I was almost excluded from the process of pursuit of victory. Then, it's not fun, isn't it? I played but it wasn't fun . . . I don't think we can say such situation is fun.

Chulsoo's comments suggest that participants need to play with people who have similar or slightly better skill levels in order to maximize the enjoyment they experienced playing recreational sports. In addition, participants may not enjoy the game if they contribute little to the achievement of winning. He argued that winning and enjoying games are two different goals even though they are closely interrelated.

While the majority of informants believed common goals existed within recreational sports, a few informants disagreed. They felt that race/ethnic groups have very different goal orientations. For example, Jeehun felt that Asian Americans usually have "much more of competitive nature to not only win the game, but also improve their own skill sets than any other races." He believed White or African Americans have "far less competitive atmospheres" and they are "just out there for have fun" and "break a sweat" while Korean Americans tend to "truly wanna win" and "wanna excel their own ability." He described this underlying competitiveness as Asians or Koreans' "an innate feature that makes them want to be the best that they can be almost anything they do." Jeehun supported his idea using the 2008 Beijing Olympics as an example. The Republic of Korea won 31 medals and finished in seventh place in the overall medal standings (The official website of Beijing 2008 Olympic Games). Jeehun was certain that Koreans achieved this result because of their passion for being on the top of their field. He emphasized that the country's number of medals, relative to its population, is extremely high among participating nations. Thus, Jeehun stressed that there is no common goal in recreational sports because different race groups have different orientations toward sport activities.

Jeehun's perception was echoed partially by other informants. Some informants said that they observed a different play climate, culture, and even different rules among different groups. For example, David mentioned that he felt Hispanics are generally "rough and dirty" soccer players due to their harsh and fierce play styles. Edward and Taehyon sensed that White or African American basketball players are openly verbal and aggressive in their exhortations toward other players and tended to be "trash talkers." Minsoo described the existence of different rules in pickup basketball game between U.S. and Korea. He stated that fouls are typically called by the player who receives the foul in the U.S. whereas the foul call is usually made by the player who commits the foul in Korea. Similarly, in United States, the offensive team has to pass the ball to the defensive team and conducts a "check" when the game is temporarily stopped due to a foul or out of bound play while players in Korea resume a game without such confirmation.

Cooperation. Informants also held two different perspectives on the existence of cooperation. One group of informants perceived that cooperation is an inevitable aspect of basketball or soccer because it is an intrinsic value of team sports. Taewon stressed the structural characteristics of basketball and other types of team sports make cooperation as an indispensable element of playing these sports:

I mean basketball is a team sport. You have to cooperate with other teammates. Otherwise, it is not basketball. That's why we call it a team sport. You cannot control every situation of the game no matter how good you are. You have to pass the ball, receive the pass, go rebound, set a screen for your teammates and so on. It's not like golf that you simply play by yourself.

Similar to Taewon, other informants believed that they have to pass the ball to other players and have to perform one of the tasks specifically assigned to his position. They believed there is some level of interdependence and cooperation in recreational team sports.

However, other informants considered cooperation as highly contextual and suggested that participants do not always cooperate with one another. They pointed out teammates' skill levels, longevity of contact, personalities, and language proficiency as key factors which influenced the extent to which cooperation take place. David and Chulsoo underscored importance of skill levels and longevity of contact:

David: If we [play with strangers], you tend to play, pass the ball to the players that you know because you know what they're capable of, you don't really know how others are gonna do. You tend to pass the ball to someone who you know because it's safe.

Chulsoo: Again, [cooperation] is also a matter of skill levels If you play with people who are way better than you or way worse than you, you don't get passes or do passes. You can't perform team play or cooperate with them. We tend to pass the ball to tall or big players at the beginning because they look like good players. However, once we figure out [their actual skill levels,] we realize how much we can cooperate or do team play.

David and Chulsoo highlighted that cooperation among teammates depends on each player's skill level and the extent to which players' skill levels differ. They also implied longevity of contact plays a critical role in cooperation with unknown players because it is difficult to collaborate with others without first knowing their capabilities.

Idiosyncrasies of participants are another key factor which affects cooperation among participants. For example, being a "ball hog" (being selfish about the ball possession and scoring), "bossy," and impatient about other players' poor performance were regarded as characteristics of a bad player who negatively impacts teamwork and overall team performance. In pickup games of recreational sports, it is hard to predict whether or not teammates possess these characteristics. Therefore, some informants considered that the presence of cooperation among teammates exists on a case-by-case basis.

Language proficiency was another factor that impacted informants' perception of cooperation. David noted that verbal communication among teammates is a big part of team sports. If someone has difficulty expressing his thoughts to his teammates, cooperation may not be as strong compared to participants who do not have language barriers. Thus, cooperation is less likely to occur among teammates who do not speak the same language.

Authority support. All Korean Americans explicitly supported that authority power or institutional support exists in recreational sport settings and they do not fear interacting with different racial groups. In fact, several informants emphasized that they never felt or experienced discriminatory treatments in recreational sport activities. This is reflected in Bob's comments: "I mean if I go to basketball court, people are not gonna say, "You are an Asian. You can't play." I never experienced that. They let you play. I don't know about long time ago but right now people really don't discriminate each other."

Similarly, John stated,

I don't even feel that government or law is doing something when I play basketball. I guess you can say government has had opened the doors for African Americans when the civil freedoms were allowed, you know 50 years ago, but I really think we matured enough to say, 'You know what? We're just good. Just leave us out like this and we will figure out what to do.'

John stated that racial relations in the U.S. have improved significantly since the passing of civil rights laws and racial equality is almost taken for granted today. He affirmed the existence of social atmosphere that secure interracial contact in recreational sport settings.

Friendship opportunities. All Korean Americans strongly believed in the existence of friendship opportunities in recreational sports, even though only a few informants actually constructed strong and intimate interracial friendships through their sport activities. Chulsoo believed that recreational sport settings facilitate interracial interactions and provide participants the opportunities to become friends with others. He stated, "Playing basketball for three hours does not mean that people only play basketball for three hours." He added that as players waited their turn to play, they talked among themselves and watched other games in progress.

Notably, individuals' skill level appears to have affected friendship opportunity and the nature of interracial interactions within recreational sports. David articulated his account on the importance of skill level building friendship with other participants:

If they like the way he plays, they're gonna tell him to come up and play more often. Maybe even come and join the team or something like that. But if not, they are not gonna call him. [He can more easily build friendship with others if he has] similar or maybe even better [skill levels than others]. Then you will be like 'Oh yeah, come with us.' It's pretty much like some kind of respect from the others.

David explained that participants tend to admire someone who exhibits proficient skills and want to play and interact with that player. Conversely, participants tend to be indifferent to someone who exhibits poorer skills. This suggests that the skill level of an individual may facilitate or impede meaningful intergroup contact.

Some informants suggested that an individual's exceptional ability can even mitigate language problems. Bob observed that Korean Americans who had poor English had difficulty developing friendships with American players because of breakdowns in communication. However, some informants stressed that as long as a player exhibited excellent skills, he may be attractive to others because the most important matter in some play settings is simply "how good you are." In this meritocratic atmosphere, lack of English skill does not really impact friendship opportunities as long as a player demonstrates superior skill levels.

Another critical factor for establishing intergroup friendship might be *the longevity of contact*. Peter described how he established friendship with a Hispanic male through basketball:

I used to go to play pickup basketball every Saturday morning. And, the first few weeks, I really didn't know the people so there was a lot of pushing and trash talking. But I went every Saturday . . . I saw the same people at the same court so after a while we kind of, got to know each other little bit, you know. It became more of friendly match instead of competitiveness . . . I played every Saturday morning with this guy (a Hispanic male). And I started working so I kind of lost a contact but, he found me somehow on Facebook, you know, we started to talking again and since I can't go to play basketball, he comes visit me at work at night.

Peter continued playing basketball even though he did not receive favorable attention from other players. His comment illuminated, regardless of the fulfillment of Allport's original four optimal conditions, intergroup contacts need to be sustained for a certain period of time in order to build cross-group friendships.

Ironically, although all informants believed in the existence of friendship opportunity, a majority of informants did not establish strong interracial friendships through recreational sports. Rather, many informants indicated that they had built relatively superficial friendships with outsiders of their own race/ethnicity. For example, Taewon described his friendship with a White basketball player:

I met him several times at the basketball court and we started to chat a little bit. It turned out we studied somewhat similar topic. So we said hi whenever we saw each other at the school or basketball court. But that was it. We never really hanged out together. We were more like an acquaintance to each other.

Similarly, Edward stated that he does not really socialize with his multiracial soccer teammates "outside of the soccer field." He described that his teammates only contacted one another when "the soccer season begins." Even though Edward had been playing with the same team for a couple of years, his bonding with other racial groups within the team seemed to be sporadic. Thus, informants' perceptions toward friendship opportunities in recreational sports did not mirror their actual experience of intergroup friendship formation.

Recreational Sports as a Means of Racial Integration

Similar to the friendship condition, our analysis identified some discrepancies between informants' perceptions and their actual experiences in terms of how recreational sports affect their racial attitudes. Although all informants contended that interracial contact within recreational sports helped establish harmonious racial relations, some informants stated that it did not significantly change their racial attitudes. Jeehun was the one who strongly believed the positive impact of recreational sports. He eloquently explained how participating in sport activities with different racial groups can contribute to interracial relationship:

Oh yeah. No doubt about it . . . Sports in general is, I think it's the closest thing you can get the most number of people to be as close as possible as an even playing field in terms of life in general. Language, you know huge differences, culture, there is huge differences. Just general life style, huge differences. But in sports, there are set rules, set dynamics within sports that are pretty universal, pretty paramount throughout the world. So I mean, you talk about basketball in [this town] and you talk about basketball in Seoul, Korea, they both know what they're talking about. They're talking about the same sport . . . one person who knows absolutely nothing about the other culture can get together and still, play together. Sports can do that. Sports, I mean, you name anything else you know, in life that can do the same thing that sports can do as far as unifying different culture and age groups and all that, that will be the day that hell freezes over. I mean there is nothing else other than sports that can really do that.

Jeehun's comments suggested that recreational sport contexts seemed to endow common focal points among participants and provide social opportunities by making different groups share, participate, discuss, and think about something together.

Jake explained how positive effects of interracial interaction during recreational sports can expand to other social spheres. His interracial contact experience actually changed his perceptions toward African Americans:

I think so. I think I somehow changed my bias about Blacks and other racial groups by playing sports with them. People say all kinds of craps about Blacks but I realized that not all Blacks are athletic or good at sports, you know what I mean? . . . You can't treat others based on those [racial prejudices]. There is always an exception. It's an individual thing.

Through his interaction with African Americans during recreational sport activities, Jake recognized he had engaged in racial stereotyping and changed his racial attitudes.

Unlike Jake's experience, however, Bob's perceptions toward African Americans did not change for the better, even though he had played basketball frequently with African Americans for the past eight years. He stated,

To be honest with you, I don't know about that. Even though I have good Black friends, really smart and went to like Ivy schools, I don't see them as Blacks. I see them as just my friends. It's different. If I see just random

Black persons, I will be cautious to talk to them and listen to what they say.

Bob differentiated his African American friends with other African Americans and noted that his interactions with African Americans during recreational sports did not alter his negative views toward African Americans in general. Nevertheless, Bob still believed that recreational sports can facilitate harmonious interracial integration because the context fosters intergroup interactions and participants tend to be friendly and look for "a good time" and "fun." His comments suggested that his positive contact experience is limited to recreational sport settings.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this study is first of its kind to investigate Asian Americans' perceptions of optimal conditions in recreational sport settings that might contribute to ameliorating interracial conflict. Our results offered rich insight into the complexity of Korean Americans' interracial contact experience during recreational basketball and soccer. We found that Korean Americans' perceptions on the existence of optimal conditions were markedly different and such differences were largely a function of six key factors. Moreover, our findings suggested that satisfying optimal conditions may be unimportant for informants to experience positive interracial contact during recreational basketball and soccer. While Pettigrew and Tropp (2000; 2006) stressed that contact studies should extend their focus beyond the optimal conditions and explore other factors that promote or curb contact's ability to reduce prejudice, we believe that identifying the six key factors can be an important stepping stone for further development of contact hypothesis.

Skill level was one of the most crucial factors that impacted Korean Americans' interracial contact experiences. Not only did skill level affect informants' perceptions on equal status, cooperation, and friendship opportunity condition, it influenced the amount of enjoyment they acquired while participating in recreational sports with other racial groups. What accounts for this importance of skill levels? On the one hand, it may be due to the structural characteristic of sport which divides participants into either winners or losers at the end of the activity (Edwards, 1973; Woods, 2006). Since winning provides greater pleasure than losing for most people, informants tend to stress the importance of having requisite skills to compete. On the other hand, it is also possible that informants' stress on skill level stemmed from the social world of recreational basketball and soccer (Strauss, 1984; Unruh, 1980) in which they competed. Informants generally embraced meritocracy and displayed a strong orientation to winning or being proficient in their activity. This relatively serious attitude toward sport activities seemed to be manifested in informants' emphasis on skill and their prolonged engagement in the activity. It could be that other Korean Americans participate in recreational sports primarily for socializing or fitness and may care little about skill.

Many informants mentioned that equal status is absent in recreational sport settings due to a perceived status hierarchy based on participants' skill levels. This finding corresponds to Rees and Segal's (1984) argument that a status hierarchy ex-

ists in organized sports and reinforced by coaches' evaluations of athletes. Despite the absence of coaches in recreational basketball and soccer, Korean Americans made judgments about other players' skill level and distinguished participants' status. Participants' perceptions of skill level were influenced by players' race and visible physical attributes, especially in the situation that other players' actual skill levels were unknown. They stated that African Americans were "inherently" or "genetically" predisposed to higher performance in sports, particularly at basketball, than other racial groups, while Hispanics were considered good soccer players. Likewise, they stated individuals with a masculine body and who were tall were considered superior basketball players. In sum, a status hierarchy seems to be pervasive even in recreational sport settings that are relatively informal in nature.

Clearly, these Korean Americans not only held strong racial stereotypes but assumed that other recreational sport participants also shared these beliefs. Why and how did Korean Americans adopt racial bias and assume others did the same? Although these questions are beyond the scope of this study, many researchers have observed that racial stereotypes about sports ability are pervasive in the United States (Carrington, 2002; Entine, 2001; Hoberman, 1997). Our data suggested that informants passively espoused racial stereotypes from their peers or inattentively generalized their personal experiences. For example, they often heard racial stereotyping from their friends and peer groups. They also observed that a basketball court where the best players usually played was typically occupied by African Americans or Whites. Asians, on the other hand, were rarely seen playing on this "best court." Moreover, they noticed that people from some European countries and South American countries always excel in soccer in the World Cup and European soccer leagues while African Americans dominate professional basketball leagues such as the National Basketball Association (NBA). Through these experiences, informants seemed to acquire and reinforce the idea that a particular race group is naturally inclined to superior performance in certain sports. Of course, study findings may vary by sport and society—ethnic and racial stereotypes gleaned in this study may not be present in other sports that are historically outperformed by Asians or Whites such as table tennis and ice hockey.

However, it is also important to note that many informants believed race and physical attributes are imperfect indicators of participants' actual skills. Rather, they insisted that longevity of contact is more important in order to adequately assess other players' skill levels. The longer participants played recreational sports together, the more accurately they understood other players' actual ability and less relied on race and physical attributes. Thus, informants felt that a player's status, over time, was much more a function of his actual skill than his race or physicality.

A critical question here is what happens if recreational sports participants do not let members of a particular racial group have sufficient opportunities to display their capabilities? Korean Americans stated that they were usually the last participants to be picked for basketball games and believed that Whites and African Americans perceived Asian Americans as inferior basketball players. Their perceptions and experiences were quite similar to other Asian Americans' described in our opening quote from the *Time* magazine article on stereotypes of Asian American basketball players and Jeremy Lin, an Asian American NBA player who scored

more points than any other players in the first five starts since 1976. If Asian Americans are indeed perceived as less athletic and skilled participants in basketball, other racial groups are likely to provide fewer passes and not recognize them as worthy of full cooperation. It means Asian Americans in general have more difficulty in being recognized as skilled and must work harder in demonstrating their ability in recreational basketball. Moreover, since our findings suggest that Asian Americans are considered poor athletes in basketball and soccer, other participants may be indifferent about socializing with them and choose to avoid interactions with them unless they display extraordinary skills. Asian Americans may have greater difficulties establishing strong bonds with other racial groups and their chances for developing interracial friendship in these recreational sport settings may be limited considerably. Due to racial stereotyping from other participants, it appears members of a particular racial group might have to persevere and put forward extra effort to prove and demonstrate that they possess sufficient skills in certain sports.

All Korean Americans believed that interracial contact in recreational sports was sanctioned by authority and expressed comfort in their interaction with other racial groups in these settings. On the one hand, the social atmosphere of recreational sports has changed markedly since Allport (1954) originally formulated the contact hypothesis a half-century ago, an era when blatant racial segregation and discrimination were visible and accepted as a common practice. Today, racial segregation or discrimination is legally prohibited and Korean American informants thought little of having to secure the support of authority figures when accessing recreational sport settings. Thus, the contact hypothesis' authority support condition was taken for granted by study informants. On the other hand, informants' beliefs about authority figures supporting interracial contact in recreational sports context may stem from the types of contact situations in which they have been exposed. Informants used recreational facilities operated by universities or municipal governments. These places are relatively open and equal opportunity for access to these facilities is strongly sanctioned. As such, informants were not aware of the necessity of authority power because they do not perceive blatant discrimination or unequal treatment. Therefore, the finding may be simply rooted in the characteristics of facilities that informants have used where strong authority power exists.

While researchers proposed friendship opportunities as the fifth optimal condition for positive intergroup contact (Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Jackman & Crane, 1986; Pettigrew, 1997), all Korean Americans commonly supported the existence of this condition in recreational basketball and soccer settings despite the fact that most of them did not establish intimate friendships with other racial/ethnic groups via recreational sports. All informants claimed that interracial contact within recreational sport settings positively impacts interracial relationships even though some informants' racial prejudice remained unchanged after prolonged and frequent interracial contacts. Thus, informants' optimism that recreational sport can be a vehicle for racial integration was not firmly supported by our data. This seeming incongruity between informants' perceptions and actual experiences indicates that it is highly problematic to treat recreational sport participation as

a monolithic entity that always produces positive or negative effect on interracial relationships. While prior studies on contact hypothesis' applicability in sports have debated the possibility that sports can be an ideal context for intergroup contact, our findings suggested that such inquiry is too simplistic to fully understand the dynamics of intergroup contact within recreational sports. Given the Korean Americans' various perceptions on optimal conditions and interracial contact experience as well as the impact from the six key factors, whether or not recreational sports can promote intergroup harmony seemed to depend on the specific sport context.

We also found that the importance of optimal conditions' existence for positive intergroup contact experience is, at least in recreational sport setting, highly questionable. We did not find any logical relation between Korean Americans' perceptions on the existence of optimal conditions and their establishment of harmonious interracial relations. Rather, our data implied that the outcome of intergroup contact during recreational sports mainly depend on complex interplays of the six key factors and specific sport contexts where intergroup contact takes place. This finding is consistent with Pettigrew and Tropp's (2000; 2006) assertion that the presence of the original optimal conditions may be unimportant for creating positive intergroup contact experience.

Our findings possess several practical implications. First, practitioners should neither presume recreational sport settings satisfy contact hypothesis' optimal conditions nor expect participating in sport activities with different racial groups to automatically contribute to harmonious interracial relationship. Korean Americans varied greatly in their perceptions on the existence of optimal conditions. We found no evidence to support that participating in recreational basketball or soccer with different racial groups always positively affects participants' racial attitudes and interracial relations. Similar to several previous studies (McClendon & Eitzen, 1975; Miracle, 1981; Chu & Griffey, 1985), these findings suggested that it is naïve to generalize recreational sport settings as an ideal context for interracial contact. Second, if recreational sport agencies want to provide positive interracial contact experience to their clients, they should not focus on the fulfillment of optimal condition but investigate potential factors that foster or stymie positive contact experience. Although the six key factors might serve as a guideline for the agencies, our data suggested that other factors might be as important as the six factors depending on specific recreational context. Finally, practitioners should be aware of potential racial bias among recreational sport participants. Some Korean Americans held strong racial bias about athleticism. They suggested that other racial groups have similar racial stereotypes and such prejudices are pervasive in other sport activities. For agencies, examining these potential racial stereotypes and their impact on the interactions among recreational participants is important to provide enjoyable and quality sport experiences to a racially diverse clientele.

Finally, this study contains several limitations. First, our results only represent interracial contact experience of first and second generations of Korean Americans who were between the ages of 19 and 36. Second, this study only captured males' perspectives. Third, this study investigated the case of basketball and soccer, two recreational team sports that are intrinsically collectivistic and cooperative in

nature. Finally, this study was conducted in two southern cities, so the findings are subject to regional bias. It is our hope that future study addresses these limitations to deepen our understanding of interracial contact in recreational sport settings. For example, future study can investigate more diverse Korean American populations such as third or fourth generation Korean Americans as well as female Koreans. Since leisure scholars identified varying leisure experience based on level of acculturation and gender (Kim et al., 2005; Scott et al., 2006; Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1989), subsequent generations and female Korean Americans are likely to have markedly different perspectives and experiences on interracial contact during recreational sports. Future study can also investigate the interracial contact during non-team sport activities such as golf and cycling. Since non-team sport activities are more individualistic and less cooperative compared to team sports, investigation on this type of sport will broaden our comprehension on intergroup contact during recreational sports. Acquiring study samples from more diverse locations will also help determine whether or not our findings can be generalized more broadly. These lines of inquiry are expected to produce different study outcomes and unearth further details of Korean and Asian Americans' interracial contact experience in recreational sport activity.

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