

Adolescents' Information Behavior when Isolated from Peer Groups: Lessons from New Immigrant Adolescents' Everyday Life Information Seeking

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Problem Statement

Peers are important to adolescents. Peer acceptance and membership in cliques are a significant aspect of the adolescent experience (Yu, Hoffman, & Russell, 2009). This salient feature of adolescents—the strong dependence on peers and the desire for independence from the adult world—is a natural and important phenomenon in the process of completing their developmental tasks (Scholte & Aken, 2006). The increased importance of peer friendships in adolescence is tangibly reflected in the amount of time adolescents spend with their friends. In a typical week, high school students spend roughly twice as much time with their peers (29%) as with their parents or other adults (15%) (Brown, 1990; Csikszentimihalyi, Larson, & Prescott, 1977). In addition, research in the field of Library and Information Studies [LIS] shows that teens regard their peers as their favorite and most valuable information source to acquire necessary information (Fisher, Marcoux, Meyers, & Landry, 2007; Hughes-Hassell & Agosto, 2007; Meyers, Fisher, & Marcoux, 2007).

However, for many reasons, adolescents can find themselves isolated from their peer groups. According to a study of peers' status among adolescents in the U.S. (Ryan, 2001), 75% of 7th graders belonged to one or one more clique groups, but 15% were classified as isolated. More specifically, young immigrant adolescents may find themselves easily isolated due to differences in culture and language. New immigrant adolescents in the United States may experience difficulties in joining established social groups. This can result in a transitional period in which a peer group is unavailable to them. When this happens, how do they compensate for this lost information source? Previous research has shown that peer groups are an important information source for young people. How then, do new immigrant adolescents seek information to cope with their social isolation and other stressful life situations?

To answer the above questions, this dissertation explores the information world of new immigrant adolescents by conducting in-depth interviews with recently arrived immigrant adolescents in the United States. It will provide a preliminary understanding of isolated adolescents' information world by describing new adolescent immigrants' information needs, and how they seek and utilize information.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify and describe new immigrant adolescents' information needs and information seeking behavior when isolated from peer groups. The detailed research objectives and the research processes for achieving the objectives are as follows:

First, the research seeks a basic understanding of who immigrant adolescents are, their salient characteristics, and, in general, what is known about immigrant and adolescent information behavior in their daily life contexts and specific information environments.

Second, this study conducts in-depth interviews with new Korean immigrant adolescents in Tallahassee, Florida, about their specific information seeking behavior. Prior to the interviews with new immigrant adolescents, participants' isolation and loneliness will be assessed with measurement scales via oral surveys. Subjects will also be invited to participate in in-depth interviews about their information practices when isolated from peer groups: what their daily life is like, how they cope with their daily problems, and how they use information to cope with their context. Finally, this research analyzes the interview outcomes, discusses limitations, and considers some of the implications of this work for future research and practice.

Significance of Research

Because there are few studies about immigrant adolescents' information seeking behavior in the information science (Caidi, Allard, & Quirke, 2010; Courtright, 2005), this research will provide an initial descriptive understanding of socially and emotionally isolated immigrant adolescents' information seeking behavior in their daily life context. The results of the proposed study will fill a gap in the information seeking behavior related to both youth information seeking and the information needs of immigrants. This dissertation will be a significant contribution to the literature on immigrant adolescents' information needs and information seeking behavior. Much descriptive work in this area—youth information behavior and immigrants' information world—needs to be conducted to set a foundation for further study, leading to explanation, prediction, and theory development. In that sense, this study will be a first step toward developing a distinct model and theory of information seeking behavior for isolated adolescents.

This work will also make a significant contribution by informing librarians, educators, and other professionals who work with youth. Increased understanding of special user groups

such as isolated immigrant adolescents will impact the provision of library programs, services, and learning curricula. The data from this study will provide input for the successful design and delivery of information services and instruction for adolescents, as well as a basis from which to support healthy growth for adolescents seeking to fulfill their information needs without the help of peers.

Finally, this study will provide an initial understanding of information needs and seeking behaviors of people dealing with isolation and loneliness—for example, newcomers in organizations, transfers from other schools or organizations, teens suffering from peer-bullying, etc. Furthermore, the proposed research will be the first step in a larger research agenda: How can information professionals such as librarians supply information and information services for people who have lost their information routes and sources for accessing relevant information because they are socially marginalized and isolated from their organization members or peers, who represent one of the easiest ways to learn information?

Research Method

(1) Sampling and Recruitment

New Korean immigrant adolescents isolated from peers are the target population for this dissertation. A sample of twenty Korean immigrant adolescents who have lived in Tallahassee, Florida for three years or less (since 2007) will be sought. Subjects should be who meet two conditions for this research: first, ‘recently arrived within 3 years or less (since 2007) in the United States’ these youth must be ‘foreign born teens between 12-18 years or non-migrant sojourners for education in secondary schools.’ Second, ‘the isolated from peers’ should satisfy two conditions—socially isolated and emotionally lonely. In addition, to distinguish from the rejected, the isolated should have basic social competence and adjustment skills to be

participants of interviews. In order to measure the three conditions—emotional loneliness, social isolation and social competence skills, the scales in Table 1 will be used to measure the conditions empirically.

Table 1. Identifying the Isolated from Peer Groups

Scales for Measuring Isolation		The Sample to Conduct Interviews
Emotional Loneliness (UCLA Loneliness Scale)	High Score (> over 40 points in the sum)	The Isolated from Peer Groups
	Low Score	
Social Support (MSPSS)	High Score	
	Low Score (< below 4 points in the average of the sum)	
Social Competence Skill (Walker-McConnell Scale)	High Score (> over 90 points in the sum)	
	Low Score	

In this dissertation, the isolated refers to those who have high scores in the loneliness test with ‘*UCLA Loneliness Scale*’ (Russell, 1996; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978), low scores in social support test with ‘*Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support [MSPSS]*’ (Canty-Mitchell & Zimet, 2000; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988; Zimet, Powell S., Farley G, Werkman, & Berkoff, 1990), and high scores in social competence and adjustment test with ‘*Walker-McConnell Scale for Social Competence and School Adjustment*’ (Merrell, 2008).

Because new immigrant adolescents are “a hard-to-reach or hard-to-identify population” (p. 157), the use of probability sampling is not possible (Schutt, 2006). Thus, in this dissertation, snowball sampling and convenience sampling will be utilized. This approach is most likely to lead to the identification of individuals who meet the conditions required in the study. In addition, Korean youth are the focus of this study as the researcher is a bilingual speaker in

English and Korean who can interview youth in Korean thereby simplifying the interview process and ensuring the validity of the data.

Interview participants will be sought in a variety of ways. A recruitment flyer will be attached on announcement boards in public libraries and Korean community churches in the Tallahassee area. Immigrant adolescents in Tallahassee also will be contacted via informants—pastors or directors of youth groups at Korean churches within Tallahassee. Subjects will be invited to participate in oral surveys to measure the degrees of loneliness, isolation, and social competence with participants and in in-depth interviews to discuss their information seeking practices when isolated from peer groups. All survey instruments will be translated into Korean to ensure understanding of the survey questions. To verify the correction of translation, the researcher will recruit another bilingual (Korean-English) person to review the translated wording.

(2) Data Collection: In-depth Interviews

The interviews will be conducted one-on-one, and all contents of the interviews will be digitally recorded in audio files. All data acquired from intensive interviews will be transcribed in Korean and then be translated into English. For this process, another bilingual (Korean-English) translator will be recruited to verify the correctness of the translation. More specifically, a semi-structured interview guideline will be previously prepared as a map to lead interview processes. Its primary purpose is to act as a memory-aid for the interviewer and achieve consistency in interviewing with many subjects. The main categories of questions are: (1) demographic information (2) the journey and experience of immigration (3) the meaning of information (4) current life problems and information needs (5) information sources and channels (6) evaluation of used information sources and channels, etc. To insure reliability,

similar questions will be repeated in different situations or different expressions in order to keep a consistency in the responses. Finally, the target number of in-depth interviews is twenty.

However, recruitment and interviews will continue until the saturation point, the point when new interviews yield little additional information, is reached (Kvale, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schutt, 2006).

(3) Data Analysis

All data acquired from intensive interviews will be transcribed in the interviewees' mother tongue, Korean, and then translated into English. Transcribed texts in English will be coded, categorized by each theme, and compared to the contents of each interviewee. The data will be coded using 'narrative analysis.' This "coding strategy revolves around reading the stories and classifying them into general pattern" (Schutt, 2006, p. 343). In classifying and summarizing the contents within main themes provided by each interviewee, the analysis will look for patterns and similarities in interviewees' narration. Data analysis will be performed using the computer software *QSR NVivo 9*. The analysis will look for relationships and patterns within transcripts logically and systemically.

(4) Limitation of the Method

The method used in the study has some limitations. The first issue is the representativeness in sampling. As it is necessary for participants to be selected using non-probability sampling, it will not be possible to generalize findings to the population of interest. However, qualitative research does not aim to focus on generalizability to a larger population, but rather to describe and obtain deep insights and understanding of the particular behavioral and social processes of a particular group or person. In that sense, the relatively small sample size

and purposive sample—to find out isolated adolescents—is a more reasonable approach for understanding isolated immigrant adolescents’ information world.

Second, in-depth interviewing depends on “verbal” narratives. The use of language and communicability between researchers and interviewees lie at the center of this method. Thus, this method should overcome barriers that can arise when collecting data from people from disadvantaged or illiterate, semi-illiterate groups like new immigrants with poor English skills. In the verbally hard-to describe cases, such as abstract behaviors, beliefs, and customs, this method has limits in obtaining rich data from interviewees’ narration in these contexts. Therefore, in order to offset the weakness of in-depth interviewing by over-reliance on verbal narration, this dissertation uses measurement scales to identify the concepts—*isolation and loneliness*—which are abstract and subjective concepts verbally hard to define by adolescents.

Third, the researcher bias may occur during the process of organizing and interpreting the interview’s transcripts and making a theoretical framework. In in-depth interviewing, the researcher is the primary “instrument” of data collection and analysis. This means that it is possible to understand the interviewees’ narratives according to the researcher’s own volition and the research may interpret and organize the interviewees’ comments in line with the researcher’s biases. In order to minimize researcher bias and maximize self-retrospective examination, this dissertation will keep referring to various theories and references related to adolescents with multicultural backgrounds.

Finally, there are ethical issues to consider. Oral surveys can rarely be anonymous because they take place face-to-face. In this study, it is essential for the researcher to know who has high scores about social loneliness and low score of social support for follow-up interviews. Therefore, the researcher will emphasize the promise to maintain confidentiality before data

collection begins. The researcher will insure also that privacy and confidentiality are maintained in the process of addressing other interviewees or addressing previous interviewees.

Research Procedure: Time Line

The research will be accomplished in three phases: (1) data collection; (2) data analysis; (3) writing up the dissertation. Data collection, via oral surveys and in-depth interviews, will occur in August to October. Data analysis will take place between November and December, and dissemination activities, such as writing the dissertation and preparing the defense presentation, will occur in between January and March 2012. The time line table is as follows:

(1) Data Collection

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|--|--------------------------|
| 1) Contact Participants | August, 2011 |
| 2) Perform Intensive Interviews/ Surveys | September/ October, 2011 |

(2) Data Analysis

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|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| 1) Transcribe Interview Tapes | November, 2011 |
| 2) Analyze Surveys and Interviews | December, 2011 |

(3) Data Dissemination

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|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1) Write Up Findings | January/ February, 2011 |
| 2) Defense/ Presentation | March, 2012 |

Research Budget

Funding is requested to provide gifts as a compensating for participation for surveys and in-depth interviews. For oral surveys and intensive interviews, the participants will be given a \$20 gift card for buying MP3 files or books at the Amzon.com. Also, funding is requested to purchase software and equipment for qualitative data collection and analysis. A digital audio recorder is required to record interviewing and produce audio files. *Nvivo9* software program,

qualitative data analysis software, is asked for to facilitate the analysis of the qualitative data collected from interviews with new immigrant adolescents isolated from peer groups. A brief budget summary is as follows:

Items	Price	Quantity	Total
Software for Qualitative Data Analysis (<i>NVivo 9</i>)	\$650.00	1	\$650.00
Digital Audio Recorder (<i>Olympus WS-710M 8GB</i>)	\$150.00	1	\$150.00
Participants' Cost (Survey/Interview Subject Compensation)	\$20.00	20	\$400.00
Domestic Travel Fees (Meetings with Subjects for Interviews/Surveys)	\$200.00	*N/A * gas fees, beverages during interviewing, etc.	\$200.00
Payment for a Bilingual Translator (for verifying correct translation)	\$25.00 per hour	30 hours	\$750.00
Travel Fees for Conference Attendance (2011 ASIS&T)	\$500.00	**N/A **gas fees, meals, etc.	\$500.00
			\$2,650.00 Total

- Other Financial Support

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- Teaching Assistantship:
To receive partial tuition waivers and stipends; School of Library & Information Studies, College of Communication & Information, Florida State University, Sep. 2006 – Present (See also CV)

Name of the Dissertation Advisor Endorsing the Proposal

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