

Oh, L.S. (1997). A Discussion of Korean American Youth. S. Hamilton, MA: Center for Youth Studies.

OVERVIEW

Who am I? This is one of the main questions Korean American youth struggle with every day. Growing up in a different culture than their parents, young Korean Americans are faced with different issues from other teens.

The biggest issue between parents and children is one of language and culture. Sometimes referred to as the first generation, the second generation of the 1.5 generations, children of immigrants are just beginning to try and find their own identity. The phrase "first generation" refers to adults who grew up in Korea, whereas the phrase "second generations" typically refers to people who grew up in the United States and has trouble with the language and culture. The third category referred to as the "1.5" generation are those who are fluent in both Korean and English and able to go from culture to culture with ease.

Most Korean American youth have communication problems with their parents, due to language and cultural barriers. When I was growing up, I used to be ashamed of my parents during "back-to-school" night. Fellow Korean American students agreed. "They always wanted to come and show their support, but they never understood a word my teacher was trying to say," says one teenager. "I used to always wonder why my parents couldn't be like my Caucasian friend's parents. I always used to wish I had blond hair and blue eyes," she continues.

If Korean American youth are really to be secure, they must first discover who they are and where they come from. They must be able to embrace and critique their heritage along with coming to terms with their own identity.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What are some things that you have learned from my parents and their culture?
2. Why are you the way you are today? What are some things or events that have helped shape your personhood?
3. What are some ways that your parents communicate to you and you communicate with your parents other than words?
4. How does being a Korean American teenager differ from being an American teenager?

IMPLICATIONS

1. With the growing number of Korean American youth not being able to communicate with their parents, youth workers need to be sensitive of these issues at home.
2. Youth workers need to be able to teach young people that identity is not strictly based upon outward things, but instead, on inner characteristics and beliefs.

3. Since this is a sensitive topic for parents, youth workers must be able to be a liaison for the parents. The youth worker should never replace the parents, but rather, should come alongside and help the young people see different ways that parents communicate love and care.

4. Instead of seeing the culture of their parents as "old school" and "foreign," youth workers can teach each students to respect and appreciate their roots. In this way instead of feeling shame, young people can be proud of their heritage.

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