

Cultural Interview

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Cultural Interview

For this cultural assignment, the interview was conducted with a 26-year-old female who was born and raised in Seoul, South Korea. For the purpose of this interview, she will be identified as “Emma”. Verbal permission was obtained from Emma to conduct this interview in person at her apartment in San Jose, California on June 26th, 2021.

Purnell’s Twelve Domains

The Purnell Model for Cultural Competence was created as a conceptual framework to guide healthcare professionals towards increasing their cultural knowledge and awareness. The model is composed of twelve domains that incorporate ideas about differences in values, beliefs, and practices of individuals, and the ultimate goal of this model is to improve multidisciplinary members’ ability to work with people from all cultural backgrounds (Purnell, 2005).

Overview of Heritage

Prior to moving to the United States in pursuit of better educational opportunities at the age of 23, she spent the most of her life with family and friends in South Korea. She recalls Seoul as a city of contrasts. High-rise buildings and skyscrapers are ubiquitous, but ancient palaces dating back to centuries ago can also be found among the concrete jungle. As Seoul is the capital city and largest metropolis, she described her hometown as an “economic and cultural hub” of South Korea (Emma, personal communication, June 21, 2021).

South Korea is ruled under a democratic government with a careful system of checks of balances, similar to that of the United States. As for education, she mentioned that schooling was especially “stressful and difficult” during her high school period. In 2018, she moved to the U.S. to further her studies and graduated from San Jose State University in 2020 with a master’s degree in statistics. She currently works as a software developer at Argos-labs.

Communication

Korean, also known as Hangul, is Emma's first language and one that she feels the most comfortable in speaking. Although English has been taught in school ever since she was in kindergarten, English was taught by Korean teachers and emphasized grammatical accuracy over fluency in communication. Therefore, she is aware of her accent and inability to pronounce some words precisely.

Bowing is a key component of nonverbal communication to express various attitudes in South Korea. Emma described that a casual bow is used when greeting someone informally, whereas the most formal bow is used to express sincere apology. In terms of their willingness to express feelings, Emma described Koreans tend to be less vocal about their thoughts in order to prevent "harsh feelings, conflicts, and a loss of face" (Emma, personal communication, June 21, 2021). Building upon the concept of saving face, South Koreans rarely reject others in a straightforward manner. They often avoid saying no or give negative feedback, even when they do not entirely agree on the subject. Therefore, being able to read facial expressions and respond to changes in tones are essential to communicating in this indirect speech style.

Honorific suffixes and titles are another distinctive feature of Korean language. Honorifics are words specifically meant to show respect for people who have superior positions in the Korean cultural hierarchy, like seniors and authoritative figures. Emma described honorifics as an indication of how close you are to someone. Koreans would always utilize this form of speech when they meet someone for the first time to show respect and a lack of familiarity.

Family Roles and Organization

Confucian philosophy has a profound impact in defining the traditional view of family roles and organization. Under the Confucius influence, families in the past decades were often organized in a patriarchal manner where the male exhibits dominance and the female displays obedience. Nowadays, Emma believes that expecting absolute obedience from females is outdated, as gender equality has been gradually attained over the years. Women's societal status has now advanced tremendously as compared to decades ago.

South Koreans are considered collectivists as they prioritize the needs of the group over individual desires. Their identities are strongly affected by group loyalty and interconnectedness, so they believe that their individual acts will affect others' perception of the entire family. Emma described that the nuclear family is currently the most common family structure, denoting that the family consists of father, mother, and two children. Korean parents' ultimate goal is to raise successful children who are more prosperous and educated than themselves. Emma expressed that the younger generations are under massive pressure constantly due to the high expectations to excel in education and career. Other than academic excellence, filial piety is also expected from children. Emma described that elderly are always honored with utmost respect and obedience is expected from the younger generation.

In terms of Korean's views on sexual orientation, divorce, and single parenting, Emma shared that Korean's views on these matters have changed over time. However, she mentioned that the older generations remain negative about LGBTQ individuals because they see people from this community incapable of forming a regular family structure as mentioned above. Though divorce has become a more common phenomenon in the present day, single mothers are

still victims of criticism as they are “out of the norm” (Emma, personal communication, June 26, 2021).

Workforce Issues

The workforce culture of South Korean is known for its stringently tiered system and unwritten rule of overtime. Respect for seniors is not only expected in the family setting, but also emphasized at the workplace. According to Emma, “kkondae” refers to an older person who expects unquestioning obedience from junior staff, and “gapjil” is a colloquial expression referring to the authoritarian attitude by someone over a subordinate staff member. These terms are coined based on the hierarchical nature of the Korean work culture. Emma recalled her friends living in South Korea, who were looked down upon if they left work before their boss or any individual of higher ranking. To avoid this criticism, they typically work longer hours than what was listed in their contracts and are not compensated for this extra time. This type of working culture contributes towards Korea’s reputation of being one of the countries with the longest working hours.

Biocultural Ecology

Stomach and liver cancers are common medical conditions found in Koreans. Emma believes that this is the result of the unhealthy culture of binge-drinking and bonding sessions in both casual and workplace settings. Large amounts of alcohol consumption puts adults within the working-age population under high risk of developing liver cancers.

Korean skin color is often light-toned and they favor light skin. In comparison to the American average measurements of height and weight, Koreans are smaller and shorter in stature. Emma brought up that Koreans have a high beauty standard regarding physical characteristics. Though everyone is born different, Koreans view plastic surgery as a widely

accepted practice to achieve a V-shaped jaw, double eyelids, and slim figure. Emma believes that the immense pressure of achieving unrealistic beauty standards, unhealthy work culture, and unreasonable parental expectations contribute to the high depression and suicide rate in South Korea.

High-risk Behaviors

Drinking is one of the high-risk behaviors that most Koreans engage in because they believe drinking helps with getting closer to each other. Emma mentioned that Korean workers are routinely expected to participate in “hwe-sik”—the act of binge-drinking with managers and colleagues. Emma recalls that she used to drink at least two to three times per week with her friends, and this is “nothing out of the ordinary” for those in their adulthood (Emma, personal communication, June 26, 2021).

Teenage pregnancy in Korea is stigmatized and discriminated against. Females becoming pregnant at a young age might result in expulsion from school, exclusion from job opportunities, and even isolation from friends and family. Therefore, Emma recalls that sex education was introduced early on, and young people tend not to engage in risky sexual behaviors to avoid undesired consequences.

Nutrition

Korean cuisine is mainly based on rice, seafood, meats, and vegetables. Kimchi, a staple in Korean cuisine, consists of fermented napa cabbage or radish is served at almost every meal in households and restaurants. Interestingly, Emma calls kimchi the national dish as she thinks that kimchi embodies the Korean identity. When growing up, she recalls her parents teaching about how kimchi is beneficial to their digestive and immune health.

Korean ginseng is a notable herb that has been used in traditional medicine for centuries. Emma was told that ginseng is highly valued for its ability to boost the immune system and strengthen cognition. While ginseng can be consumed in its original form, Emma shared that ginseng is now commonly packaged as dietary supplement, teas, and energy drinks for convenient consumption.

Pregnancy and Childbearing Practices

Pregnancy is generally viewed as a blessing, unless this event occurred at an inappropriate stage of life such as prior to marriage or during adolescence. Prenatal care is valued in Korea with an emphasis on managing and reducing stress for the mother. Emma shared that because Koreans believe everything the mother feels, eats, and thinks will affect the infant, pregnant women are often encouraged to minimize movements, replenish themselves with nutritious diets, and keep only positive thoughts in mind. Emma mentioned that “tae-gyo” is the term to describe how the mother’s mood and behavior will have physical and psychological effect on the baby, so family members tend to keep negative events away from the pregnant women so that the mother and the child will have positive thoughts.

Death Rituals

Many Koreans believe that deceased individuals have transitioned from the present world into the afterlife. Funerals are usually held on the third day after death. While Koreans also wear black clothing at the funeral, family members of the deceased would wear specialized outfits to distinguish themselves from others: males would wear black suits with an armband and females would wear black traditional hanbok with white ribbon hair pin. Emma recalls that when she attended a family friend’s funeral, the eldest son of the deceased was expected to be in charge and greet all the friends and guests. Visitors would first bow twice to the deceased, then once to

the mourners with words of condolences to show respect. Interestingly, Emma brought up a culture of non-gloomy funerals where guests at the funeral service hall would play card games and drink alcohol together. She mentioned that because funerals often take place over three days, these entertainment measures would help the mourning guests stay awake.

Spirituality

Emma believes that Korea has a very diverse religious culture. Common religious beliefs include Buddhism and Christianity, but diversified communities co-exist harmoniously with no one religion exerting dominance over the other. She suggested that most people are unaffiliated with any religion, including herself. However, she brought up the traditional Confucius philosophy when interviewed about spirituality because this school of thought has a strong influence on societal behaviors and practices, including their view of life and morality. According to Emma, Confucian philosophy encourages people to live their life to the fullest with an emphasis on good moral character and virtuous behaviors.

Health-Care Practices

South Korea has a universal healthcare system where all residents have guaranteed access to medical services. Emma remembers that she used to visit the doctor for regular health check-ups every two years and that everything was covered by the government. She experienced cultural shock when she found out a large portion of American healthcare is under the fee-for-service system. As covered previously, South Korea is one of the countries with the highest suicide rate. Despite the prevalence of mental health issues, social stigma still remains surrounding those suffering from mental illness, which discourages those affected to seek psychiatric help. Emma believes that many Koreans forgo treatment because they are adamant about how others see and talk about them. For cold and flu, Emma mentioned that ginger tea,

Asian pear with honey, and porridge were foods that she grew up eating when she was sick. To promote general well-being, traditional practices like herbal medicine, acupuncture, and moxibustion are used. Like other East Asian practices, acupuncture and moxibustion are performed to promote a smooth flow of energy by stimulating the pressure points.

Health-Care Practitioners

Because South Korea has one of the most competitive and intense education systems, Emma shared that Koreans think of physicians as the best and smartest individuals. Without a high level of academic distinction, these students would not be able to outperform others and enter medical schools. Therefore, physicians often have a positive image and are well-respected in society. Emma mentioned that while physicians' professional advice is generally respected, people no longer blindly follow what the physicians suggest without questioning or asking for clarifications. This phenomenon is a result of technological advancement and convenient access to reliable resources online, so people would compare what they read on the internet to what the physician suggests in hopes of receiving the best possible care.

Nursing Interventions

If Emma was a patient in an acute care setting, the following nursing interventions would be implemented in order to achieve cultural competence: 1) Be aware of the patient's Korean background; 2) Overcome the language barrier by using hand gestures, pictures, or translator; and 3) Take Korean herbal medicine and remedies into considerations when developing plan of care. Madeleine Leininger's first nursing modality is the concept of preservation or maintenance as healthcare providers would "help people of a particular culture to retain and/or preserve relevant care values in order to maintain their well-being, recover from illness, or face handicaps and death" (Busher, 2015). The nursing interventions listed above would fall under this modality

of care. The first step to providing culturally sensitive care and preserving the patient's values is to have awareness (Narayanasamy, 2005) & White. Language barriers may pose an obstacle to effective communication and exchange of medical information, so measures like gestures and translation services may help preserve what the patient wants to express in its most complete form. While taking Korean traditional medicines like ginseng and ginseng into consideration aims to respect and preserve their customs, explaining the risks of increased bleeding and advising the patient to avoid using these herbs would shift the last nursing intervention from the first modality to the second and third modality of care, which are accommodation or negotiation and repatterning or reconstructing respectively.

Transcultural Standard of Practice

According to Douglas et al. (2011), there are twelve standards of practice to guide nurses when providing transcultural care. Standard 9 focuses on cross-cultural communication and states that nurses should utilize culturally competent verbal and nonverbal communication techniques to identify the patient's values and beliefs related to their healthcare needs (Douglas et al., 2011). For example, if the patient is an old Korean male, the nurse would have to address the patient proper title and exhibit respect in verbal communication because Korean culture has a strong emphasis on showing courtesy to elderly. As for nonverbal communication, the nurse will have to bow while greeting and maintain eye contact throughout the health history taking process.

Analysis of Cross-Culture Experience

Overall, the transcultural interview conducted with Emma has been a meaningful and valuable learning experience for me. Throughout the interview, an appropriate amount of eye contact with Emma was maintained. Also, sitting across the interviewee and facing her at an eye

level was performed to build trust and facilitate a respectful conversation. At times, Emma had trouble translating certain Korean terms, such as “kkondae” and “gapjil” mentioned in the workforce issue section. Therefore, Emma was encouraged to spell out those Korean vocabularies phonetically so that she would feel less embarrassed for not being able to come up with a direct English translation.

While the communication component of the interview went smoothly, the questions prepared for the interview could have been improved. Because the interview included many close-ended questions, several questions had to be altered immediately so that Emma could answer with more information and details. In the future, I will prepare more open-ended questions to elicit elaborated answers from the interviewee.

Conclusion

The cultural interview with Emma allowed for a deepened understanding of the Korean culture. As Purnell's twelve domains served as the foundation of this interview, many aspects of one's culture extending from communication to religious beliefs were examined. Specific topics related to the medical field such as Korean's view of healthcare and providers were also thoroughly discussed. Furthermore, Leininger's modes of care were evaluated in relation to three possible nursing interventions when caring for Emma as a patient. Lastly, Douglas' twelve standards of care were also applied to a hypothetical situation of treating an old Korean male. Nurses may encounter individuals from varying cultural backgrounds on a daily basis, so the ability to build cultural competence is essential to providing appropriate care.

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