

Immigration, Cultural Adjustment, and Work Values: The Case of Korean Nail Care Workers in New York

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This study addresses the significance of acculturation, known as cultural adjustment, in examining work values among Korean female nail care workers in New York. In this study, acculturation is measured by both English proficiency and personal comfort in the mainstream cultural comfort, while four indicators are used to measure work values: the subjective evaluation of the nature of the work, both perceptions of occupational status and self-development, and the consideration of quitting the current nail job. Using a sample of 312 responses, this study shows that nail care workers have evaluated the nature of the nail care work less devalued as they experience improvements in English proficiency and cultural comfort. Second, this study also supports that cultural comfort plays a positive effect on their perception of nail care work as an employment sector in a upper-middle or upper occupational status. Moreover, there is evidence that more cultural comfort tends to lower their intention of quitting the nail care job. However, this study suggests that acculturation has little to do with perception of self-development in nail care work.

Keywords: Acculturation, Work values, Nail care work, Korean immigrant women

Introduction

Much of the past research on work values has been discussed largely under key factors, such as age, gender, race, family role, education, social origins, job experience, working conditions, and so on (Halaby 2003; Jencks, Perman, and Rainwater 1988; Johnson 2002, 2005; Johnson and Elder, Jr. 2002; Marini et al. 1996; Miller et al. 1979; Mortimer and Lorence 1979; Rowe and Snizek 1995). After emigration, then how acculturation, expressed as cultural assimilation in this paper, affects work values among immigrant workers is relatively little known within the field of its empirical research. As a case study, therefore, the main goal of this study is to address whether and how acculturation affects work values from a sample of Korean immigrant female workers in New York. Indeed, an overt image of first-generation Korean Americans in the literature or in the media so far is often portrayed as those having a strong work ethic,—that is, hard-working, disciplined, deft, or goal-oriented. In the same way, do they have a higher extent of work values in current jobs? In other words, do they have less negative perceptions about their current jobs?

In general, it is not much difficult to infer the general evaluations of their current works among recent Korean immigrant male workers. For instance, many of them have experienced employment in white-collar occupations in Korea. After their emigration to America, these Korean immigrants, with few exceptions, have had trouble finding occupations equivalent to their preceding high-status employment because of their relatively disadvantaged positions in the host labor market that are typically attributed to low English proficiency, less accessibility of job information and job networks, and/or some discriminatory forces against immigrants. Instead of accessing the mainstream labor market in the host society, as an alternative, they tend to pursue a labor-intensive and daily long-hour employment in their own ethnic small-business enclave (Fernandez and Kim 1998; Kim and Hurh 1985; Min 1984, 1995; Yoon 1997). As a result, this downward mobility in occupation can lead them to bring down their work values in current jobs regardless of different occupational statuses between small business owners and their same ethnic employees.

There is no question that occasional conflicts with spouses, high stress level, alcoholism, and gambling among Korean immigrant males are further and indirect manifestations of their relatively lower work values in the aftermath of occupational downward mobility (Hurh and Kim 1990; Min

1998). Despite this general inference of work values among overall Korean immigrant male workers, the theme of work values among first-generation Korean immigrant female workers has been almost unexplored and substantially of little interest in the preexisting research on Korean immigrants in the United States. For the most part, however, downward mobility in occupation has little relevance for the degree of their work values.

Before emigration to America, the labor force participation rate in Korea has been, overall, far lower among Korean immigrant female workers than their male counterparts. This is particularly true of Korean married women who took full responsibility for only domestic work and family care, without participating in the labor market after marriage, let alone lack of any strong preconception about work values. Even for those who have held jobs in Korea, their general senses of work values, kept ahead of immigration, can fade suddenly on the ground that any option to choose desirable jobs in the host society barely exists. Moreover, work values are also responses to an individual's life course change and new circumstance (Johnson 2002, 2005).

In this new country, the vast majority of Korean immigrant women tend to take part in the labor market because they need incomes to support themselves as well as their family members under the circumstances of expensive living costs in the host society (Kim and Hurh 1988; Light and Gold 2000; Park 1997). Besides, their husbands' relatively lower earnings in less privileged occupations are the main reason of their relatively high participation rate at local labor markets. Of course, this is no exception for other recent ethnic immigrant women (Foner 1999; Menjivar 1999; Stier 1991). In response, this study explores whether new or continuous participation at a labor market in the host economy affects Korean immigrant women's work values within a service sector of ethnic businesses, namely nail care service work.

More specifically, this study is intended to address the significance of acculturation, "cultural assimilation," in the discussion of work values among Korean female nail care workers in Korean American community. Similar to Korean male workers, first-generation Korean female immigrants in ethnic small business sectors are no exception in their employment activities that are typically characterized by labor-intensive and long-hour tasks. Faced with new working conditions, low English fluency and cultural differences from their English-speaking customers can make immigrant workers downgrade their work values. Nevertheless, the expectation of this study is that as long as Korean female nail care workers' cultural adjustment in the host society advances, it is less likely to evaluate their works negatively. Thus, it is likely that

they will evaluate certain aspects of their works more positively. With all of the aforementioned in consideration, this study employs, as units of analysis, a sample of Korean female immigrants working at Korean-owned nail salons.

In the New York City and Northern New Jersey areas, nail care businesses are treated as a major employment niche sector for many Korean immigrant women who want to pursue employment in an ethnic economic sector (Kang 2003; Min 1996; Oh 2007). This surging participation by Korean immigrant women into the nail care occupation is closely associated with less strict state regulations on cosmetology licenses, relatively high earnings, and the general dexterous capacity of Asian women. With the majority of their co-workers being the same gender, their jobs in nail care services specialize mostly in manicures, pedicures, skin care, waxing, and/or body or foot massages. The moment communication problem or cultural uneasiness mounts in their face-to-face interactions with native customers, new nail care workers, relative to more fluently-speaking and more experienced nail care workers, may perceive their current jobs as less valuable or less prestigious. In short, the main objective of this study is to examine the effect of acculturation on work values from a sample of Korean nail salon female workers.

Literature Review and Research Questions

Work values have often been identified by two dominant categories— intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of the job (Halaby 2003; Kalleberg 1977; Mortimer and Lorence 1979; Mortimer et al. 1996; Johnson 2005).¹ Intrinsic values of the job involve the rewards derived directly from the work tasks themselves (e.g., interest, task variety, opportunity, learning, and autonomy), whereas its extrinsic values have to do with the rewards obtained from the job but external to the work itself (e.g., pay, prestige, and security). Four types of work values are used in this study. Intrinsic values of the job are assessed on three measures of work values: the subjective evaluation of the nature of the work showing less interest and little task variety at work, an opportunity for self-development, and the consideration of quitting the job that corresponds to an overall extent of low work values to the work itself.² Also,

¹ Work values are defined as “general attitudes regarding the meaning that an individual attaches to the work role as distinguished from his satisfaction with that role” (Kalleberg 1977, p. 129). He further suggests the differences between values and related concepts, including expectations and needs.

² It must be true that the intention of quitting the job is affected by some other reasons, such as

as an indicator of an extrinsic value of work, occupational prestige is used in this study by measuring a subjective evaluation of nail care job status over the other kinds of occupations in society.

To examine the effect of acculturation on work values among Korean female nail salon workers, acculturation is understood in this study as the key determinant of their work values. According to Milton Gordon (1964), acculturation is called “cultural or behavioral assimilation.” It refers to the newcomers’ adjustment to the core culture by abandoning their own ethnic language and cultural traditions, and adopting the vital cultural traits of the host society—i.e., language, other types of symbols, norms, values, and attitudinal and behavioral patterns, etc. (Alba 1999; Alba and Nee 1997; Gans 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). In the recent discourse of assimilation and multiculturalism, however, some scholars observe the possibility of retaining the ethnic language and legacies with immigrants’ acquisition of the core culture in diverse frameworks of explanation, such as the spatially expanding immigrants’ communities and the subsequent growth of economic activities among co-ethnic immigrants, predominantly in the ethnic economic sectors (Logan et al. 1999; Logan, Alba, and Zhang 2002; Wilson 2003); an emergence of ethnic political paradigm in the host society (Alexander 2001); importance of family life in the new society, including intergenerational communication (Foner 1997); and an invaluable asset in a competitive global world (Kibria 2002). Nevertheless, strong ethnic connectivity at home, the workplace, or in the community can deter, to some degree, the pace of immigrants’ absorption in the core culture.

Knowledge of English, regardless of the retention of the ethnic language called “linguistic acculturation,” is regarded as a good reference of immigrants’ acculturative level in the host society (López 1999; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001; Zhou 2001). In many Korean female nail care workers, their job information about nail service is to a great degree dependent upon co-ethnic acquaintances—e.g., family members, friends, neighbors, or church members. In the same way, working with co-ethnic employees is important in their choice of Korean-owned nail parlors as workplaces. Poor fluency in English also comes into play in immigrants’ preference for their own ethnic job sectors. The same is applied to Korean female nail salon workers. Then the main tasks of a nail care service work are heavily contingent upon direct

moving, changes in life cycle or family (marriage, divorce, retirement, birth of child), a pursuit of new career, and so on. Likewise, this study views that the consideration of quitting the current job signifies, to a greater extent, a substantial alteration in beliefs and attitudes about the essential meaning of the work.

interactions with native customers speaking in English (Kang 1996). In such a service work, the ability to communicate through English is critical for their workers in order to suggest their own opinions and styles to the customers, to understand their customers' preferences and tastes, and finally, to negotiate the best options for each other. As a result, good communication skills for nail salon workers can mean more regular customers and more money, both of which can help raise these workers' work values. On the contrary, nail care service work can become less valuable when these nail care workers often face communication problems with their customers in an attempt to figure out customers' demands in style. Therefore, at first, the first hypothesis of this study is that:

The more the level of English fluency among Korean female nail care workers, the more their work values in their current nail care service occupations.

To immigrants weak knowledge and understanding of the leading cultural patterns in the host society can also cause the similar detrimental effect on their work values. Thus, just as communication problems can easily yield misunderstandings between ethnic immigrant workers and their native customers, it is also possible that immigrants' own distinctive cultural orientations and legacies can trigger a certain degree of discord and even conflict in the process of interaction with English-speaking customers (Lee 2002). Of course, it is of little doubt that some confrontations in the choice of the nail service styles or preferences between nail care workers and their customers can be also caused by discrepancies in their personal tastes, some degree of disparity in racial and class backgrounds between them (Kang 1996, 2003), or by occupational characteristics of nail care work itself as an "emotional labor" in the view of their workers (Hochschild 1979). Thus, in interactive service works, workers often reveal "some level of personal identity and self-expression into their work" (Leidner 1999, p. 83). As a result, a type of emotional labor, like nail care service, can damage the workers' well-being (Steinberg and Figart 1999).

The fact is that in 2002, approximately 70 percent of nail salons in New York State (2,500 in 3,559) and almost 60 percent of nail salons in New Jersey State (1,500 in 2,503) have been owned by Korean immigrants and a majority of the employees were Korean immigrant women (Nail Info 2003, p. 31). In the areas of these two NY-NJ States, some Korean nail care workers tend to take pride in the introduction of new styles and techniques in nail care services. For instance, some nail care service workers attempt to identify the customers' preferences and tastes, either by attending the annual Korean-

initiated nail fair or frequently exchanging information with other nail care workers. Despite their efforts to understand existing or new types of nail-related services and customers' tastes, Korean nail care workers' judgment or their awareness of the variety of nail services for their English-speaking customers can sometimes run counter to the customers' nail preferences. Otherwise, cultural misunderstanding can be far less serious in some service businesses where most of the customers and workers share the same ethnic background, or where any direct or lasting interaction between them is less present. Like nail care service business, however, cultural misunderstanding can take place anytime in ethnic immigrant businesses having direct interactions with natives as most of their regular customers. In general, the expectation of this study is that more cultural comfort can exert a positive effect on Korean female nail care workers' work values. Ultimately, less cultural assimilation can surface through some aspects of acculturative stress, such as a sense of marginality, identity confusion, declining self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and/or mental disorder (Berry and Kim 1987; Hurh and Kim 1984, 1990; Schnittker 2002). In brief, the second hypothesis proposed in this study is that:

The greater the level of personal comfort in relation to the mainstream culture among Korean female nail care workers, the higher their work values in nail care service sector.

In addition, this study of work values among Korean female nail care workers encompasses, in the analyses, some important factors: work-related (work experience before nail occupation, worker's skill level, duration of work at nail salons, work hours weekly, and job network) and socio-demographic (age, marital status, education, length of residence, and family income) variables.

Data and Method

Participants

In this study, the hypothesis that acculturation will affect work values among Korean female nail care workers is examined mostly by the analysis of quantitative data, which has been collected through three types of sampling methods. Based upon information that Korean nail salons located in New York City have five workers on average (Kang 2004), the method of a self-mailing response has been used in this study by sending five questionnaires

(in Korean) respectively to every one of 250 purposely-selected Korean nail salons among 890 Korean-owned nail salons, all of which were registered earlier at the Korean-American Nail Association of New York as of 2002. The rate of mail response was barely over 15 percent during a two-year period (2004 and 2005), with a total of 189 completed questionnaires. Faced with a relatively low response rate, two other sampling techniques have been supplemented in this study. First, I attempted to contact two Korean nail salon owners who own three to five nail salons in lower or midtown Manhattan, a total of eight salons with the number of Korean female workers in each ranging from 10 to 35. After introducing the purpose of this study through in-depth face-to-face interviews with these two nail salon owners and their eight salon managers individually, each salon manager distributed questionnaires to nail salon workers at her salon and afterwards, additional 41 responses were collected in 2005.

Along with these 230 responses which were collected from nail care workers currently working at nail salons in New York City, I also attempted to collect some data from current nail salon workers who were working at Korean-owned nail salons located in Bergen County in Northern New Jersey. After being unable to obtain a directory of Korean-owned nail salons despite their growing visibility and heavy clusters in local areas, I visited some of these nail salons in June and July of 2007. With the cooperation from some Korean nail care owners and their workers, I further collected an additional 82 responses from this New Jersey County. The two methodological issues that seem difficult to be detected at this point should be mentioned when using these three different types of sampling strategies. First, there is no way to disclose whether questionnaires mailed or delivered to each nail salon were randomly distributed and then responded by its nail salon workers. Moreover, it is unclear about the degree to which the sample collected through my own visits in the New Jersey localities is reliable and representative enough from all NJ Korean nail salon workers and their demographic backgrounds.

Second, another methodological issue unknown comes after combining mail responses with data collected through some nail salon managers and my own direct visits to some nail salons. Despite these two methodological problems, overall, a total of 312 responses collected through these three sampling methods are used in this study.³ Lastly, as a supplementation to a

³ Only 2 out of 312 respondents were Korean male nail care workers. Since this study aims to examine work values among Korean female nail service workers, these two male responses were

great deal of quantitative-based analysis for nail service workers' work values, this study has further encompassed a qualitative analysis from the data, which was collected by semi-structured, in-depth, and tape-recorded interviews with 15 Korean nail care workers. They were introduced to me in 2005 through a snowball sampling strategy; the interviews averaged 40 minutes in length.

Measures

As stated earlier, the dependent variables used in this study are four measures of work values: the subjective evaluation of the nature of the work, both perceptions of occupational status and self-development, and the consideration of quitting the current nail job. By conducting a varimax rotated factor analysis, *the subjective evaluation of the nature of the work (or work devaluation)* was measured through two items in a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree or agree, agree, or strongly agree): "I often feel bored on this job"; and, "there is little variety in job task." Cronbach's alpha (α) representing the degree of reliability in these two combined items was 0.72. As for *perception of occupational status*, respondents rated the relative occupational position of nail service work among all types of occupations in the society (low, middle-low, middle, middle-high, or high ranking job). In the analysis, this indicator of work values was coded as 1 (high) = middle-high or high and 0 (low) = low, middle-low, or middle. The reason why the original response of nail care work as a middle ranking job was converted or combined into a low occupational status response was that only 11 percent of this study's participants (35 out of 312) rated nail care job in a low or a middle-low employment status, while almost 40 percent of them (127 out of 312) evaluated nail care jobs in a middle employment status.⁴ *Perception of self-development* was rated on a 5-point Likert scale to an item (strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree or agree, agree, or strongly agree): "My job gives me a chance to do what I do best." In the analysis, this indicator of work values was also converted into a dummy variable to run a

omitted in the analysis.

⁴ Even when nail care workers are not sure of their objective employment status in the occupational ladder, it is natural that they are inclined to evaluate themselves nail care work as part of a middle employment status. In this respect, the fact is that multinomial logistic regression is a better statistical tool in predicting perception of occupational status. But, the sample size of this study limited the selection of this analytic technique, but allowed to use binary logistic regression method.

binary logistic regression analysis: 1 = (agree or strongly agree) and 0 = (strongly disagree, disagree, or neither disagree or agree). Lastly, *the consideration of quitting the current nail job* during the last month was treated as a dummy variable: 1 for “yes” and 0 for “no.”

Acculturation, as the key predictor of work values in this study, was measured by two categories: English proficiency and cultural comfort. As a measure of *English proficiency*, an overall level of English in listening, speaking, and writing was rated on a 5-point Likert scale: very poor, poor, to some degree, good, or excellent. The degree of *cultural comfort*, expressed as an emotional response to cultural understanding toward the core culture in the host society, was also rated on a 5-point Likert scale: very uncomfortable, uncomfortable, neither uncomfortable nor comfortable, comfortable, or very comfortable. Some work-related characteristics of nail care workers were included in the study as the control variables. First, *work experience* before nail care employment in America was measured by a dummy variable: 1 for “yes” and 0 for “no.” Nail care workers also evaluated their *job skills*: 1 for “skilled” and 0 for otherwise (“unskilled” or “semi-skilled”). *Duration of work* in nail care employment was measured by total years and months in past and present nail care service occupations, while *work hours* were obtained from weekly basis. *Job network* at nail salons was measured by a dummy variable scored 1 if an entry into their current nail care employment had been from friends, kin, church members, or neighbors and 0 if this had been from job advertisements in Korean newspapers or other prints.

This study also used some other demographic variables as the control variables: *age* (years), *marital status* (married = 1),⁵ *monthly family income* (a 4-point ordinal scale), and *length of residence* in U.S. (years). Additionally, two dummy variables of education were included in the analysis: *low education* (less than or equal to 12 years of schooling completed) and *high education* (more than 16 years of education). As an omitted variable, schooling ranged 13 to 15 years was treated as the reference category of both variables in nail care workers’ education.

⁵ In this study, marital status is treated a dummy variable scored 1 for currently married (N = 196) and divorced, separated, and widowed (N = 27).

Results

Descriptive Analysis

In addition to basic descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and range) from all variables used in the analysis, Table 1 includes their frequency distributions as a way to identify specific patterns of responses in each variable. However, as a measure of work values, the frequency distribution about the subjective evaluation of the nature of the work is not included because its factor scores have no substantial meaning.

In general, the overall patterns of responses are quite meaningful in the frequency distributions of three other measures of work values. For instance, the frequency distribution of perceived occupational status in nail care service business indicates that almost 47 percent of Korean female nail care workers have ranked nail care jobs as an employment sector in either a middle-upper or upper occupational status. On the other hand, approximately 63 percent of respondents have mentioned that a prospect for self-development in nail care work is very limited. Similarly, two-thirds of respondents (67 percent) have considered quitting their current nail care jobs once or more during the duration of the last one month.

The specific levels of acculturation among Korean female nail care workers have been also well identified through the frequency distributions of English proficiency and cultural comfort. It is shown that approximately 48 percent of the respondents have marked their English level as “good” or “excellent,” whereas responses of the two poor categories were, at a relatively low level, 16 percent. Moreover, the frequency distribution of cultural comfort presents their relatively high acculturation level in the host society; almost 59 percent of them, relative to 13 percent in two uncomfortable responses, have uttered feelings of their psychological (or emotional) comfort in the core American cultural patterns.

The frequency distributions and descriptive statistics of work-related and demographic variables as the control variables are also introduced in Table 1. For the question of past work experiences after arrival in America, 59 percent of the respondents mention that nail service employment has been their first job experience in America. This relatively higher labor force participation rate in nail care service implies indirectly that the nail care occupation is in the center of the economic niches for Korean immigrant females. For those who had work experiences prior to their current nail care

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analysis (N = 312)

Variable	N=312	%	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range		
					Min	Max	
<i>Work Values:</i>							
The Evaluation of the Nature of the Work	--	--	0.0	1.0	-2.2	2.2	
Perception of Occupational Status	--	--	3.5	0.9	1.0	5.0	
Low, Middle-Low, or Middle	162	51.9	--	--	--	--	
Middle-Upper or Upper (= 1)	146	46.8	--	--	--	--	
Missing	4	1.3					
Perception of Self- Development	--	--	0.4	0.5	0.0	1.0	
Yes (= 1)	112	35.9	--	--	--	--	
No	197	63.1	--	--	--	--	
Missing	3	1.0					
Considered Quitting the Current Job	--	--	0.7	0.5	0.0	1.0	
Yes (= 1)	210	67.3	--	--	--	--	
No	102	32.7	--	--	--	--	
<i>Acculturation:</i>							
English Proficiency	--	--	3.5	1.0	1.0	5.0	
Very poor	12	3.8	--	--	--	--	
Poor	38	12.2	--	--	--	--	
To some degree	110	35.3	--	--	--	--	
Good	89	28.5	--	--	--	--	
Excellent	60	19.2	--	--	--	--	
Missing	3	1.0					
Cultural Comfort	--	--	3.6	1.0	1.0	5.0	
Very uncomfortable	5	1.6	--	--	--	--	
Uncomfortable	47	15.1	--	--	--	--	
Neither uncomfortable nor comfortable	73	23.4	--	--	--	--	
Comfortable	122	39.1	--	--	--	--	

Table 1. (Continued)

Variable	N=312	%	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range	
					Min	Max
Very comfortable	61	19.6	--	--	--	--
Missing	4	1.3				
<i>Work-related Variables:</i>						
Work Experience before Nail Job	--	--	0.5	0.5	0.0	1.0
Yes (= 1)	128	41.0	--	--	--	--
No	184	59.0	--	--	--	--
Skilled	--	--	0.5	0.5	0.0	1.0
Yes (= 1)	143	45.8	--	--	--	--
No	169	54.2	--	--	--	--
Duration of Work in Nail Job	--	--	6.3	4.7	0.1	22.4
Less than year	29	9.3	--	--	--	--
1-3	83	26.6	--	--	--	--
4-6	73	23.4	--	--	--	--
7-9	42	13.5	--	--	--	--
10-12	47	15.1	--	--	--	--
13 or more	34	10.9	--	--	--	--
Missing	4	1.3				
Work Hours Weekly	--	--	42.7	16.3	8.0	90.0
Less than 10	11	3.5	--	--	--	--
10-29	44	14.1	--	--	--	--
30-49	82	26.3	--	--	--	--
50-55	129	41.3	--	--	--	--
56 or more	42	13.5	--	--	--	--
Missing	3	1.0				
Job Network	--	--	0.5	0.5	0.0	1.0
Yes (= 1)	156	50.0	--	--	--	--
No	156	50.0	--	--	--	--
<i>Demographic Variables:</i>						
Age	--	--	38.0	9.0	18.0	63.0
18-27	44	14.1	--	--	--	--

Table 1. (Continued)

Variable	N=312	%	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range	
					Min	Max
28-37	102	32.7	--	--	--	--
38-47	115	36.9	--	--	--	--
48-57	46	14.7	--	--	--	--
58-63	5	1.6	--	--	--	--
Marital Status	--	--	0.6	0.5	0.0	1.0
Yes (currently married =1)	223	71.5	--	--	--	--
No	89	28.5	--	--	--	--
Monthly Family Income	--	--	2.3	0.8	1.0	5.0
Less than \$2,000	47	14.6	--	--	--	--
\$2,000-\$5,000	149	46.4	--	--	--	--
\$5,000-\$10,000	88	27.4	--	--	--	--
\$10,000 or more	23	7.2	--	--	--	--
Missing	5	1.6	--	--	--	--
Length of Residence in the U.S.	--	--	9.3	6.6	0.3	35.0
Less than one year	9	2.9	--	--	--	--
1-4	91	29.2	--	--	--	--
5-8	67	21.5	--	--	--	--
9-12	45	14.4	--	--	--	--
13 or more	95	30.4	--	--	--	--
Missing	5	1.6	--	--	--	--
Low Education ^a	--	--	0.4	0.5	0.0	1.0
High Education ^b	--	--	0.3	0.5	0.0	1.0
Less than or equal to 11	11	3.5	--	--	--	--
12	119	38.1	--	--	--	--
13-15	75	24.0	--	--	--	--
16	98	31.4	--	--	--	--
17-18	7	2.2	--	--	--	--
Missing	2	0.6	--	--	--	--

Note: ^a denotes educational attainments of high school or less, whereas ^b denotes 4-year college education or advanced degrees. The reference group of both educational variables as an omitted variable is two-year college or vocational education.

employment in America, Appendix A presents a list of their previously experienced occupations or industrial sectors; there is no question that most of their past jobs have been in personal services or sales industries. In addition, Appendix B enlists the reasons why they decided to quit their previous jobs.

In the query of their own skill levels at nail care service jobs, more workers (54 percent) have responded to unskilled or semi-skilled categories. Two additional work-related variables show that the averages of duration of work at nail care service and work hours on a weekly basis are 6 years 3 months and almost 43 hours, respectively. For instance, some of the frequency distributions have revealed that in fact, 26 percent of Korean female nail workers have been working in this job sector for over 10 years, while almost 55 percent of them have been working for more than 50 hours a week. Indeed, almost half of their current nail jobs at Korean-owned nail salons (50 percent) have been obtained through the introductions of close friends, kin, church members, or neighbors. Besides, information on demographic variables (not explained here) provides further details of the respondents' personal backgrounds.

Table 2 presents patterns of work specialties in nail care service from the sample of this study.

Workers' specialties have been, first and foremost, in manicure service only (42 percent), followed by manicure and pedicure (15 percent), more than 4 services (14 percent), manicure and pedicure and waxing (6 percent), and so on. Interesting enough, this frequency distribution also shows that skin care is in the least of work specialties among Korean female nail salon workers. Aside from workers' own training and licenses in specific nail service fields, an article in a Korean newspaper issued in New York uncovers that the scale of nail salons, often understood by the total number of nail care workers, tends to determine their workers' specialties in the workplace (*The Korea Central Daily*, July 21, 2007). For instance, almost 60 percent of Korean-owned nail salons in the New York-New Jersey areas are small-scale parlors usually constituting less than five workers per nail salon. The vast majority of these small-scale nail salon workers provide the customers several types of nail services on their own, such as manicure only, both manicure and pedicure, sometimes these two services with waxing. Additionally, about 30 percent of Korean-owned nail salons in these areas can be classified as medium-sized, usually consisting of six to ten workers per nail salon. With such services as manicure, pedicure, and waxing services, these scale nail parlors often provide an extra service, either a body or foot massage for

Table 2. A List of Specialties in Nail Salon Occupation

	N	%
Manicure Only	132	42.3
Manicure/Pedicure	48	15.4
More than 4 Job Assignments or Everything	45	14.4
Manicure/Pedicure/Waxing	18	5.8
Manicure/Pedicure/Massage	9	2.9
Manicure/Massage	6	1.9
Management/Supervision	5	1.6
Pedicure Only	4	1.3
Massage Only	4	1.3
Manicure/Waxing	3	1.0
Manicure/Skin Care	3	1.0
Skin Care (Facial) Only	2	0.6
Manicure/Pedicure/Skin Care	1	0.3
Manicure/Waxing/Massage	1	0.3
Manicure/Waxing/Skin Care	1	0.3
No Responses	30	9.6
Number of total responses	312	100.0

customers in several separated rooms. The remaining 10 percent of Korean-owned nail salons in these areas are upscale salons consisting of 11 to 40 workers per nail salon. These types of large-scale nail salons are often called spa nails because skin care (facial) and massage services in 5 to 10 rooms are available at these salons along with basic types of nail care services. Lately, these total service spa nails continue to grow rapidly in Korean-owned nail salons in Manhattan, New York.

Acculturation and Work Values

Table 3 presents regression results of four models testing the impact of acculturation on work values among Korean female nail care workers.

In measuring work values by way of the subjective evaluation of the nature of the work which combines feeling of boredom with perception of task repetitiveness on the job (work devaluation), both indicators of acculturation—English proficiency and cultural comfort—have been statistically significant. When nail care workers have more proficiency in their English skills, they are inclined to evaluate the nature of their nail work more valuable. On the other hand, it can be inferred that their work

Table 3. Unstandardized Coefficients for Four Measures of Work Values

Variable	OLS Regression	Logistic Regressions		
	Work Devaluation	Occupational Status	Self- Development	Consideration of Job Quit
<i>Acculturation:</i>				
English Proficiency	-.14* (.07)	-.22 (.37)	-.05 (.19)	-.23 (.17)
Cultural Comfort	-.21*** (.06)	.91** (.35)	.19 (.17)	-.48** (.16)
<i>Work-related Variables:</i>				
Work Experience before Nail Job (yes = 1)	-.16 (.12)	-.42 (.60)	.29 (.32)	.51+ (.30)
Skilled (yes = 1)	-.33* (.16)	.43 (.75)	.15 (.42)	-.74* (.41)
Duration of Work in Nail Job	.03 (.02)	-.08 (.09)	-.06 (.06)	.11* (.05)
Work Hours Weekly	-.00 (.00)	-.01 (.02)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Job Network (yes = 1)	-.20 (.12)	.60 (.58)	.23 (.31)	-.38 (.29)
<i>Demographic Variables:</i>				
Age	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.04)	-.00 (.02)	-.04* (.02)
Marital Status (currently married = 1)	-.09 (.14)	.49 (.68)	.42 (.37)	-.38 (.34)
Monthly Family Income	-.14* (.08)	1.05*** (.38)	.32 (.22)	-.07 (.19)
Length of Residence in the U.S.	.00 (.01)	.05 (.05)	.01 (.04)	-.02 (.03)
Low Education ^b	-.26* (.15)	-.56 (.68)	.06 (.38)	-.59 (.38)
High Education ^c	-.06 (.16)	-.36 (.70)	-.43 (.41)	-.62 (.41)
Constant	2.60*** (.51)	2.39** (1.18)	-2.44* (1.15)	5.78*** (1.35)
R ²	.13	--	--	--
Chi-Square	--	26.29	11.95	29.36
Degree of Freedom	--	13	13	13
Nagelkerke R Square	--	.26	.08	.15
-2 Log Likelihood	--	104.37	264.73	301.50

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors (N = 312).

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001 (two-tailed test); +p < .05 (one-tailed test)

devaluation in nail care service can occur at the time when nail salon workers suffer from their poor communication skills with English-speaking customers. Otherwise, a good command in English is essential for nail care workers in order to lower their sense of work devaluation (e.g., dullness and monotony) in the nail care profession. For instance, one of my informants, Ms. Bae, who is a skilled manicurist in her early 30s, has been working for almost 6 years in a Korean-owned nail salon in a middle-class residential area of Fort Lee, New Jersey. When I asked the degree of English fluency to her, she responded to me that she can communicate, without much difficulty, with her Jewish customers about the topics related to today's weather, Korean foods, how to deal with manicured hands, or her family. She also said to me, "nail care work seems simple and repetitive, but that is actually not the case. The shapes of customers' fingers are different and they ask me for diverse services in their finger styles. I really focus on my work." Likewise, there is evidence that the confidence in the core culture of the host society can enable nail care workers to reduce their level of work devaluation. When nail care workers have better knowledge and understanding of the core culture, let alone its language, they can seize better control of their emotions in face-to-face interaction with native customers, which can in turn lead them to reevaluate their repetitive job tasks in more positive ways.

Using perception of occupational status as another measure of work values, English proficiency has been by no means its significant predictor. But, cultural comfort as the other indicator of acculturation exerts a significant impact on variation in perceived occupational status in nail care work. Thus, more psychological or emotional comfort in American culture plays a critical role in enhancing nail care workers' evaluation of occupational status. Indeed, it makes sense that more recognition of limited options for decent jobs and a relative occupational position of nail care occupation across all American occupations, understood as a trait of rising cultural comfort, can cause Korean female workers to evaluate nail care work as an employment sector in an upper-middle or upper occupational status. In the third model of work values, the result demonstrates no critical effects of both acculturation measures (English proficiency and cultural comfort) on perception of self-development under nail work.

This study has also suggested that acculturation can affect the consideration of quitting the current nail job among Korean female nail care workers. One finding reports that English proficiency as one indicator of acculturation has no significant impact on the intention to quit the current nail care job. The coefficient of cultural comfort however demonstrates that a

sense of personal comfort in the mainstream culture affects the consideration of quitting the nail care job. Obviously, nail care workers have had less consideration of quitting their current nail care jobs in times of their more familiarity with mainstream cultural values, attitudes, behaviors, or styles. In other words, it is likely that the basis of immigrants' comfort about the mainstream culture is closely associated with their increased knowledge for the core cultural groups, as well as their greater understanding about American social circumstances. As another inference, in cases where nail care workers have a better grasp of the American labor market structure, its workplace culture, their own credentials, and the harsh realities of life in new world, it is expected that they can take into account their nail care employment as a relatively good occupation to hold in the new country.

As its illustration, Ms. Kim as my informant, who is in her mid-30s, has been working for almost 5 years at a Korean-owned nail salon in Lower Manhattan, New York. She immigrated 17 years ago and graduated from a 2-year college in the city. Before her current employment in nail care service, she worked at a hospital as a nurse's assistant and a waitress in a Korean-owned restaurant. When I asked about her consideration of quitting the nail care job during the last month, she replied, "I have never considered quitting. Once you become a skilled worker, pay in nail care employment is not bad and this job is not too physically laborious, either. And I can take a day or two off every week." Similarly, less intention of quitting the nail care work has been suggested in other informants as well. Overall, five other informants have expressed that nail care employment pays relatively good wages and likewise, it provides flexible work hours (especially for married women) in comparison with jobs in other small businesses in ethnic economy—e.g., restaurants, delis, grocery stores, dry cleaners, or laundry shops. Indirect evidence is also seen in Appendix B where nail care work is even viewed as an alternative channel for a new career to those female immigrants previously engaged in other business sectors. Of work-related variables, workers' job skill is the important predictor of two measures of work values—the subjective evaluation of the nature of the work and the consideration of quitting nail job. Thus more skilled nail care workers have evaluated the nature of the nail care work much valuable, along with their less intention to quit their current nail jobs. Nevertheless, more duration of work at nail care service has resulted in the consideration of quitting the nail care job. Of demographic variables, monthly family income has been a significant predictor of two measures of work values among Korean female nail care workers.

Discussion

In the setting of an ethnic niche economy—that is, Korean-owned nail care service businesses in New York and New Jersey areas, this study has focused on whether acculturation (cultural adjustment) exerts a substantial effect on work values among Korean female nail care workers. In an emotional labor where recurrent interactions with customers are a central part of work tasks, workers often tend to experience negative feelings about their job (Bulan, Erickson, and Wharton 1997). At that point, nail care work is one of the jobs requiring emotional labor for the workers (Kang 2003). At first, this study has shown that nail care workers evaluated the nature of the nail care work less devalued as they experience improvements in English fluency and personal (cultural) comfort. In other words, this implies that Korean female nail care workers' English proficiency as a measure of acculturation can lead to their positive evaluation about the nature of the nail care work. Second, this study also supports that Korean female nail care workers have viewed nail care work as a upper-middle or upper job category in its occupational status, particularly at a time when their level of personal comfort about American culture is further improved. Moreover, this study reveals that cultural comfort plays a critical role in lowering the intention of quitting their current nail care jobs. However, this study reveals that cultural assimilation has no significant effect on perception of self-development in nail care sector, as another measure of work values in this study.

Until now, there has been little systematic research aimed at addressing work values under the influence of immigrants' process of acculturation. For this reason, any direct comparison is in fact impossible to evaluate how important the results of this study are. To some extent, this is because past research has been predominantly interested in assessing the importance of acculturation in immigrants' mental well-being without much discussion on the nature, meanings, and values of their work activities (Burnam et al. 1987; Hurh and Kim 1990; Im and Meleis 2001; Rivera et al. 2007; Schnittker 2002). Put it more simply, work values among immigrant workers might be a missing mediator between acculturation and their psychological well-being. Although this topic was not empirically tested in this paper, future studies need to explore the causal relationships among acculturation, work values, and psychological well-being.

Though limited, this study can be to a certain extent meaningful for future studies exploring how acculturation is linked to work values in

different Korean immigrant employment sectors. In turn, this study can be used as a work of reference in discussing the sources of work values for first-generation Korean females whose job tasks need relatively quick but many daily interactions with English-speaking (or non-English speaking) customers. For instance, the point that acculturation will affect work values can be further assessed from Korean female workers working in other small ethnic business sectors, such as delis, groceries, producer stores, dry cleaning shops, or restaurants. Likewise, future studies also need to identify gendered work values by acculturation. As a matter of fact, many first-generation Korean immigrants in the United States run small family businesses using their family members as the key labor force so as to reduce the burden of labor costs (Light and Bonacich 1988; Min 1996; Park 1997). In this respect, whether acculturation has different implications for work values between married couples (husband and wife) working in family businesses can be another interesting topic for future studies, alike.

Overall, this study is considered to be a first step in addressing the significance of acculturation in Korean immigrant women's work values in a Korean niche economy—nail care jobs. However, this present study has been exposed to several limitations. First, the other important measures of work values—wage, autonomy, and security in nail care employment - are not included in this study.⁶ Second, the vast majority of Korean married women suffer from their multiple roles mostly led by the roles of workers, mothers, and wives (Kim and Hurh 1988; Min 2001). This study provides no knowledge of how their manifold roles at the workplace and at home affect their work values. Besides, future studies of immigrants' work values need to control for the factors of working conditions in nail care work. For instance, Kang (1996) suggests the potential effect of exposure to toxic chemicals on health problems (allergic symptom, dizziness, nose and eye irritations) among Korean nail care workers. In fact, some health symptoms—e.g., throat, nose,

⁶ In nail care employment, the evaluation of workers' wages is not easy because of their hourly wage rate intermingled with unpredictable tips from customers. As an alternative, it is useful to measure a subjective evaluation of wage satisfaction. As another intrinsic value of nail care employment, autonomy in nail care work often relies upon work days and seasons. For instance, nail care workers' autonomy in the job can be far limited on weekends—Saturday and Sunday, and in late spring and summer seasons when many customers come to visit their nail salons. Also, security in nail care employment, understood as an extrinsic value of the job, can be measured by the skill level of the nail care workers, which has been used in this current study as a control variable. Thus it is expected that skilled nail care workers can achieve better security in nail care employment because a rapid growth of Korean-owned nail salons in New York-New Jersey areas causes a supply shortage of these skilled workers.

skin or respiratory irritations, dizziness, headaches, or body pains—are most pronounced among the nail care workers exposed in poorer air quality or those whose main job tasks involve removal of old nail polish, artificial nails, and new nail polish by using a variety of the solvents⁷ (Hilpakka and Samimi 1987; Roelof et al. 2008). Then it is still unknown about whether such unsafe and hazardous working conditions in nail care service sector influence their work values. Lastly, another topic unexplored in this study is the association between work values and job satisfaction (Gruenberg 1980; Kalleberg 1977). These shortcomings should be considered in future studies.

⁷ In detail, Roelof and her associates (2007, p. 3) report specific impacts of each solvent used in nail/ beauty products on health symptoms or problems. For example, acetone, as a chemical ingredient in nail polish products, can cause such potential health effects as eye, nose, or throat irritation and dermatitis. Likewise, toluene, a colorless liquid used as a solvent, can spawn more health problems to nail technicians—e.g., eye, nose, or throat irritation, headache, anxiety, muscle fatigue, insomnia, and so on.

Appendix

Table A. A List of Previously Engaged Occupations or Service Industries Prior to Nail Salon Occupation in America (N = 128)

	N	%
Deli-Grocery Businesses as Owner/Cashier/Worker	15	11.7
Clerical Works in Office or Banking	14	10.9
Teaching in School or Cram School	12	9.4
Garment Industry/Clothing Stores	11	8.6
Restaurants as Owner/Cashier/Waiter/Waitress	11	8.6
Beauty Salon or Skin Clinics	8	6.3
General Merchandise Stores	7	5.5
Other Service-Oriented Businesses	7	5.5
Dry Cleaners/Laundry Businesses	5	3.9
Dental Receptionists or Assistants	3	2.3
Fish Stores	3	2.3
Bakery Stores	3	2.3
Import-Export Trade Companies	3	2.3
Publishing Company	3	2.3
Students	3	2.3
Hospitals or Clinics as Nurses	2	1.6
Beauty Supply Stores	1	0.8
Florists	1	0.8
Repair Services	1	0.8
Insurance	1	0.8
Bookstores	1	0.8
Shipping Industry	1	0.8
Photo Labs or Studios	1	0.8
Jewelry Stores	1	0.8
Alteration Stores	1	0.8
Post Office	1	0.8
No Responses	8	6.3
Number of total responses	128	100.0

Table B. Reasons to Stop Working in Previous Occupations

	N	%
Laborious or Fatigued	28	21.9
Low Wage or Earnings	20	15.6
Unstable Future	20	15.6
Moving	20	15.6
Conflict with Owner or Co-Workers	5	3.9
Others:	35	27.3
To Start up Nail Business	5	
Not My Aptitude	4	
Learn Nail-Related Skills	3	
To Learn English	3	
Sold or Failed Business	3	
To Join in Family Business	1	
To Take Care of Child (Kids)	1	
Marriage	1	
Divorce	1	
More Study	1	
Stress	1	
No Responses	11	
Number of total responses	128	100.0

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