

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: KOREAN IMMIGRANT MOTHERS'
EDUCATIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES:
A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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This study analyzed the parental involvement experiences of four first-generation Korean immigrant mothers living in a Mid-Atlantic state to expand the research base and knowledge of traditional parental involvement paradigms. The study was guided by two overarching research questions: 1) How do four Korean immigrant mothers understand and perform their roles in the educational experiences of their children?; and 2) How do contexts (i.e. micro, meso, macro, and transnational) influence the mothers' understandings and performance of their roles in the educational experiences of their children? Multiple concepts and frameworks related to parent involvement and immigrant experiences informed the conceptual framework of this study. They include the parent role construction of Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005); the minority parent role construction of Auerbach (2007); Cultural Ecological Theory (Ogbu & Simons, 1998); and transnationalism (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Portes, 2003). Despite a certain level of variability among

the participants' educational beliefs and practices, they commonly regarded private supplementary education (e.g. *hagwon*, or Korean style afterschool programs, and private tutoring) as an effective means to give a competitive edge to their children academically, which is largely practiced in Korea. Also, not all mothers placed priority on school-based involvement including school visits and Parent Teacher Association membership. The findings suggest that the mothers' current perceptions, expectations, and behaviors related to their children's education are influenced by their upbringing and educational experiences in Korea, continuing transnational interactions with people and culture in Korea, and their racial and ethnic minority status in the U.S. The findings also suggest that a traditional school-centered conceptualization of parent involvement may be limited in capturing immigrant parents' strong commitment of their children's education, which may not be congruent with conventional norms of school involvement. As U.S. federal government and local school districts continue to emphasize parents as partners in education, teachers and administrators will benefit from this analysis of one growing population which demonstrates high achievement in the school system. Furthermore, this research challenges and expands a stereotypical and monolithic understanding of Korean immigrants as "model minority" through a detailed case study of one group of mothers.

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PRACTICES: A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents who raised their son and daughter to become wonderful parents and showed me what unconditional love was by their actions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Misconceptions, stereotypes, and conflicting perceptions about Korean immigrant mothers exist. A popular version of Asian American mothers describes them as “Tiger Mothers” (Chua, 2011) who are aggressively involved in their children’s education and strict in controlling them. On the other hand, they have also been described as uncooperative and not involved when they do not participate actively in PTA and school events (Kwon, Suh, Bang, Jung, & Moon, 2010; S. Lee, 2005; Yang & McMullen, 2003). These perceptions become more complex when embedded in different contextual factors including dominant conceptualizations of parent involvement, which often marginalized immigrant minority parents’ ways of supporting their children’s education (Auerbach, 2007).

Parents are increasingly perceived as partners of education; as such, a greater understanding of them is required in order to forge productive relationships. However, there is limited information regarding Korean immigrant mothers’ experiences vis-à-vis their children’s education in the field of education. Despite significant within-group variability, they are subjected to stereotypical images of the model minority that ascribes wholesale characteristics to them as a racial group. The view often ignores backgrounds and contextual factors, such as socioeconomic status, family composition, and employment status, that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Korean immigrant mothers’ and their children’s educational experiences.

Background

When Yale University professor Amy Chua published her memoir, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011), and the *Wall Street Journal* released an excerpt from the book with a provocative title, “Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior: Can a Regime of No Playdates, No TV, No Computer Games and Hours of Music Practice Create Happy Kids? And What Happens When They Fight Back?” (2011, January 8), the U.S. media and public responded with heated discussions and debates over the way Asian American parents rear their children (see Corrigan, 2011 for a related article on the National Public Radio website). Asian American parents were under the spotlight. Discussions and debates around *Tiger Mother* reflect part of the inconsistent images that Korean/Asian (immigrant) mothers have assumed both in the media and the literature (Abboud & Kim, 2006; Kwon, Suh, Bang, Jung, & Moon, 2010; S. Lee, 2005; Yang & McMullen, 2003).

Perceptions about Korean immigrant mothers have been mixed and conflicted, especially regarding their involvement in their children’s education. Teachers and administrators have reported low expectations about Korean immigrant mothers’ involvement (Kwon et al., 2010) and perceived them as uncooperative and not involved in the educational decision making process (S. Lee, 2005). The same group of mothers are often perceived as very involved in their children’s education and are accused of placing too much emphasis on academic achievement and mastery of English (Yang & McMullen, 2003).

Two points warrant consideration in the inconsistent perceptions about Korean immigrant mothers. First, research has shown that several constraints exist

when Korean mothers try to become involved in school-based engagements, such as language, cultural differences, lack of knowledge of educational terms, perceived discrimination, and structural barriers in school (Cho, 2007; Kwon et al., 2010; S. Lee, 2005; Lew, 2006; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Yang & McMullen, 2003). These constraints contribute to the low levels of school-based involvement among many Korean immigrant mothers.

Second, educators' interpretations of Korean immigrant mothers' involvement are based largely on the way parent involvement is conceptualized in the United States. The idea of parental involvement in the United States is generally connected to participating in school-based activities, being involved in decision-making processes, and participating in parent-teacher conferences. All of these activities may be new to many immigrant adults who have received most of their formal education in Asian countries (Guo, 2011). This narrow definition of parent involvement is problematic because it "perpetuate[s] the myth of uninvolved minority parents" (Auerbach, 2007, p. 252). Research has shown that minority parents' involvement behaviors are largely outside of the conventional model of parent involvement; indeed, what occurs outside school can be very important (López, 2001; Valdés, 1996).

The literature has documented that immigrant parents from different backgrounds have distinct understandings about the role of parents and how to support their children's schooling experiences (López, 2001; Valdés, 1996). For example, Mexican migrant workers that López (2001) studied showed their children the working conditions of physical labor in order to increase their children's motivation for academic achievement. Chua's (2011) memoir is another example of

how parents from different cultures may respond distinctively from middle class European American norms. Her goals and expectations for her children may seem excessive, and her style may look aggressive in the eyes of some people, but not for others.

As with all groups of parents, variability in experiences exists based on social class background, geographic location, immigration background, and religious affiliation within the Korean American community to name only a few. Without highlighting those differences, research on Korean immigrant parents has treated the parents as a strong variable in their children's academic performance in surveys and large-scale data analysis (Goyette & Xie, 1999; E. Kim 2002) and focused on their involvement experiences in school settings (Kwon et al., 2010; S. Lee, 2005; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Yang & McMullen, 2003). These studies on school-based involvement have discussed constraints and cultural distance between home and school, as well as the cultural insensitivity or color-blindness of some of the teachers. A few studies looked at the nature of their support outside school from the mothers' perspectives (Cho, 2007; J. Kim, 2011; Yang & Rettig, 2005). These studies present a truncated view by not attending to multiple background and contextual factors, such as their social class, race, and ethnicity, as well as immigration experiences, all which are salient in minority parents' experiences.

In particular, immigrants' behaviors and perceptions are influenced by their home country experiences prior to emigration to the United States (pre-migration experiences), as well as by their trajectory after immigration (post-migration experiences). Both of these milestones are embedded in multiple layers of contexts.

However, in studies on Korean immigration, pre-migration status has often been treated as a static variable that influenced the immigrant acculturation process rather than as a continuing factor (Min, 2007, 2013). Moreover, because of technology and ease of communication, immigrants now have easier and more access to interact with their families and friends in the home country while living in the United States. In this sense, transnationalism, which incorporates both Korean and American contexts, is useful to update our understanding of Korean immigrant mothers' experiences, including support of their children's educational experiences.

Another important contextual factor in Korean immigrant mothers' experiences is the role of ethnic community. Those who settle in areas with a concentrated Korean population have greater ethnic resources available to them than those who live in areas without a large Korean settlement. Research findings on the role of the Korean ethnic community in the involvement experiences of Korean immigrant mothers have been mixed. However, it is clear that ethnic churches and supplementary educational services in ethnic economy provided social capital and educational information that has contributed to creating an environment that promoted academic achievement (Lew, 2006; J.J. Park, 2012; Zhou & Kim, 2006). The Korean community not only offers support, but can also produce a negative influence. Comparison and competition among Korean parents can serve as a source of distress and family conflict (Yang & Rettig, 2005). In either case, the ethnic community is another significant factor in Korean immigrant mothers' experiences regarding educational support for their children.

Research studies on Korean immigrant parent involvement have not paid enough attention to complex contexts in which their experiences are embedded (i.e., the neighborhood, school district, local ethnic community, and transnationalism). In addition, race, class, ethnicity, language, culture, and immigration are salient in Korean immigrant mothers' experiences, and they need to be considered in conjunction with other contexts. More studies need to view Korean parents' involvement and the interpretation of that involvement from a holistic and comprehensive perspective. Such studies should include the parents' prior experiences in Korea, ongoing influence of their transnational activities, roles of the ethnic community cultures, and the local context.

To address this gap, the present study explores how Korean immigrant mothers make sense of and perform their role in supporting their children's education. In the following sections, I discuss the rationale and significance of this study and present the research questions that guided this inquiry. I conclude with a list of important terms in the study and a brief introduction to the subsequent chapters.

Rationale of the Study

Nationwide and in local areas, the increasing number of Asian Americans including Korean Americans is projected to continue. This demographic dynamic, combined with the growing importance on parents' roles as partners in education, calls for more inclusive ways of looking at immigrant minority parents.

Demographic Background

Between 2000 and 2010, the Asian population in the United States increased by 43%, from 10.2 million to 14.7 million. This is more than four times faster than

the growth of the total population (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012).

According to the Pew Research Center (Passel & D’Vera Cohn, 2008), Asians are projected to be the second fastest growing population behind Hispanics between 2005 and 2050, with an increase from 5% to 9% of the total population. The total foreign-born population is projected to increase from 12% of the Asian-origin population in 2005 to 19% in 2050 (Passel & D’Vera Cohn, 2008). In the Washington DC metropolitan area, Korean Americans are the third largest group among Asian Americans with high concentrations in selective counties (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2013). In the state of Virginia, the Korean immigrant population grew by 40% between 2000 and 2008 (Terrazas & Batog, 2010). These changes in demographic shifts bolster the rationale for research on Korean immigrant parents and their children. School districts, teachers, and administrators benefit from richer understanding of the diverse families they serve.

Immigrant Parents as Partners

Parent-school partnerships have gained attention in recent years. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001/2 included parent-school partnerships and required Title I funds to be used to forge a strong, two-way relationship (United States Department of Education, April 23, 2004). One of the important criteria NCLB utilizes to evaluate a school’s effectiveness and efficiency is measured by the implementation and effectiveness of parent-school or family-school cooperation programs.

Considering the increase of the immigrant population in general and Korean parents in particular, it is important to add to the knowledge base on immigrant

parents' backgrounds. A review of research suggests that a more inclusive model of parental involvement is needed to understand immigrant parents' attitudes and behaviors (Auerbach, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Moreno, Lewis-Menchaca, & Rodriguez, 2011; Simon & Epstein, 2001). Dominant parent involvement models (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Simon & Epstein, 2001) have not included consideration of specific social and cultural conditions that may impact immigrant parents. Even models that take into consideration the unique experiences of minority and immigrant parents are not inclusive enough to consider varying subgroups. Despite her attention to social and cultural conditions germane to minority parents, I argue that Auerbach's (2007) framework on minority parent roles requires more refinement to align with the characteristics of Korean immigrant mothers with elementary school-aged children.

Purpose of the Study

The present study aims to describe and analyze the experiences and perspectives of parents and does not try to examine the relationship between parental involvement and children's academic achievement. By studying four cases of Korean immigrant mothers, the present study explores the role of context in Korean immigrant mothers' parent involvement experiences. How Korean immigrant mothers respond to different contextual layers in which they are embedded (i.e., family, neighborhood, school district, and local ethnic community) becomes one of the important factors that influence their beliefs and behaviors regarding parent involvement in educational settings. Because parents' beliefs and behaviors are socially constructed, understanding the way they interact with others (i.e., family,

peers, teachers, and administrators) and the influence of those interactions on their beliefs and behaviors are also important factors. Finally, it is crucial to delve into their prior experience in South Korea, especially regarding their own education and formal schooling, and ongoing transnational engagements. These insights illuminate how two *different* contexts, i.e. Korea and the United States, impact their practices and experiences.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the present study may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Korean immigrant parents' experiences. Specifically, this study illuminates how a group of middle-class Korean immigrant mothers may share some commonalities but also possess varying trajectories, perceptions, and experiences. The study attempts to illustrate *why* a selected group of mothers respond to the U.S. settings of their children's education in a certain way and *how* they perceive their experiences as immigrant mothers. The present study also makes theoretical contributions by highlighting the role of home country factors, transnational aspects of their lives, and the role of local community. The present study focuses on parents of elementary children in one county in a U.S. mid-Atlantic region. Further, the findings inform how Korean American culture and ethnic economy/structure interact and influence parent experiences in the lower grades.

Finally, the present study sheds light on how the dominant concept of parent involvement in the field of education in the U.S. is culturally biased. The findings contribute to a more inclusive notion of parent involvement and will inform how we conceptualize immigrant parents' involvement experiences at the crossroads of race,

ethnicity, social class, immigration, transnationalism and local, social, historical and cultural contexts. This improved understanding of how Asian, specifically Korean, parents conceptualize and perform their role in their children's education will also potentially inform how to devise effective parent involvement and outreach programs, pre-service education, in-service professional development programs for teachers and practitioners, and relevant policies.

Questions Guiding the Inquiry

Two overarching research questions guided the present study:

1. How do four Korean immigrant mothers understand and perform their roles in the educational experiences of their children?

2. How do contexts (i.e. micro, meso, macro, and transnational) influence the mothers' understandings and performance of their roles in the educational experiences of their children?

Operationalized Definition of Terms

The important terms I use in the present study are defined as follows:

Parental involvement; parent engagement: Any intentional effort that parents make regarding their children's educational experiences. I will use these two terms interchangeably. In order for these terms to be inclusive of various forms of parental behaviors of the participants, I broadly define these terms as all the behaviors, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, expectations, and aspirations that parents have related to supporting their children's educational experiences in home and school.

Transnationalism: In the literature, this term is defined as “some combination of plural civic and political memberships, economic involvements, social networks, and cultural identities that reach across and link people and institutions in two or more nation-states in diverse, multilayered patterns” (Morawska, 2007, p. 149). Transnationalism incorporates beliefs and experiences from more than one country into a single conceptual framework. In this study, transnationalism broadly refers to the way Korean immigrants in the United States involve themselves in cross-national experiences, including consuming cultural and material products from Korea, communicating with people in Korea, mobilizing customs and norms carried from Korea, and comparing both Korean and U.S. contexts.

Pre-migration/Post-migration: Defined as before (pre-) and after (post-) moving to the host country, in this case, the United States of America.

Korea; South Korea: If not specified as North Korea, I use Korea and South Korea interchangeably.

Korean mothers in the United States: This is an umbrella term that refers to ethnic Korean mothers who are immigrants, short-term and long-term sojourners, and 1.5 and later generation Korean American.

(First-generation) Korean immigrant mothers: This term refers to mothers who were born and raised in South Korea, regardless of their immigration status i.e. whether they obtained citizenship or permanent resident status or they are staying here with an immigrant or non-immigrant visa, e.g. for students (F-1), dependent of a student (F-4), etc.

First-generation: Immigrants who came to the host country as an adult. All of the four participants are first-generation immigrants.

1.5 generation: Children of first generation immigrants who followed their parents to the host country before the age of twelve, or adolescence.

Second-generation: Children of first generation immigrants who were born in the host country.

Third generation: Children of second generation immigrants

Hagwon: Academically focused private after-school educational establishments in Korea and Korean ethnic economy in the United States.

Summary

The present study is designed to investigate four first-generation Korean immigrant mothers' beliefs and practices related to their children's schooling experiences. This chapter has introduced the problem and discussed the purpose and importance of the study. In Chapter Two, I lay out the contexts of the study and review the research related to Korean immigrant mothers' experiences vis-à-vis their children's education. I also describe my conceptual framework. Chapter Three presents the study's methodology. In Chapter Four, I describe my background and discuss how this positionality have influenced the study. Chapter Five presents the findings of the study case by case. In Chapter Six, I analyze and discuss the findings according to themes. Finally, Chapter Seven discusses implications and future research directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This chapter begins with an examination of the prevailing literature on parent involvement models in the U.S. educational research and their limitations in explaining Korean immigrant parent involvement in their children's education. Then, I discuss the social, historical, and cultural contexts relevant to Korean immigrant parents to provide a background of their experiences in the United States. Next, the current research on Korean immigrant mothers and gaps in the literature serves as one of the rationales for the present study. I conclude the chapter by presenting the conceptual framework.

Epstein's Partnership Model

The dominant parent involvement model (Simon & Epstein, 2001) has not paid due attention to the social and cultural contexts of minority parents and have not distinguished immigrant parents from non-immigrant parents. In this section, I highlight the importance of contexts in understanding the experiences of minority parents in general and Korean immigrant parents in particular.

One of the widely used models of parent involvement in the U.S., Epstein's partnership model (Simon & Epstein, 2001) identified six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. According to this model, partnerships "refer to the overlapping influences and shared responsibilities of families, schools, and communities for the education and development of children" (Epstein, 1994, 1995, p. 2). The authors elaborated on this framework in subsequent work:

When positive connections occur across contexts, more students are likely to be recipients of common messages and high expectations from significant adults in their lives about the importance of school, good attendance, doing homework, and good behavior. These connections are likely to result in ‘family-like schools’ where educators welcome parents and community partners, and treat each student as an individual; and ‘school-like families,’ where parents guide their children to fulfill their roles and responsibilities as students” (Simon & Epstein, 2001, p.4).

This framework broadens the scope of parent involvement as a partnership among different actors within education and provides useful terminologies that can categorize different types of involvement. However, the model has been critiqued for its limited consideration of immigrant contexts (Auerbach, 2007; Moreno, Lewis-Menchaca, & Rodriguez, 2011). Auerbach (2007) pointed out that Epstein’s model assumes that home-school partnerships are a neutral matter, rather than viewing the partnership as “a socially constructed phenomenon on the contested terrain of schooling” (Auerbach, 2007, p. 251) that reflects significant social inequality. Moreno and colleagues (2011) also pointed out that Epstein’s model does not capture the complexities of Latino parents’ home involvement due to the linguistic and social context of their experiences.

According to Auerbach (2007), the parent involvement process model of Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) provides a useful alternative to Epstein’s (2001) model by focusing on parents’ perspectives and the social nature of the parent involvement process. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), parent involvement is shaped

by parents' 1) motivational beliefs, that is role construction for involvement and parents' sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school; 2) invitations to become involved from others (e.g. the school, teacher, and child); and 3) parents' life contexts, such as family socioeconomic status, parents' knowledge, skills, time, and energy, and family culture. Even though this model broadens the perspective of family involvement by considering the perspectives and the context of parents' lived experiences, it does not specifically focus on the factors that impact immigrant families. This is particularly true when applied to Korean immigrant mothers and the model can be strengthened by considering the contexts in which Korean immigrant parents' experiences are situated.

The model and policy guidelines are based on an assumption that family, school, and community are to be integrated into a framework of collaboration and that parental involvement occurs naturally. Epstein's definition of parent involvement without consideration of the immigrant contexts is also evident from educational policies. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provides specific guidelines that schools are to follow, including parent involvement. NCLB defines parental involvement in their Parental Involvement Guideline (U.S. Department of Education, April 23, 2004) as following:

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The term "parental involvement" means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring –

- That parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;
- That parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;
- That parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and
- The carrying out of other activities, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA [*Section 9101(32), ESEA.*] (p. 31-32).

While it allows for some room for variations in actual implementation, defining how to implement parent involvement in federal policy guideline suggests that parent involvement can be understood as a normative concept that assumes right, appropriate, or standardized ways that all the stakeholders must follow. This perspective can be problematic. The White, middle-class way of parent involvement has been more aligned with how some schools and teachers operate; indeed this places minority parent involvement at a disadvantage, which may operate in different circumstances, cultures, and contexts (Lareau, 2000, 2011). Auerbach (2007) noted that minority parents' non-traditional parent involvement practices "are often invisible to schools," and "their roles [are] largely outside the partnership model" (p. 251). In particular, school-centered definitions of parent involvement do not

necessarily capture the involvement of parents from Latino and Asian backgrounds that occur beyond the school's wall.

Context of Minority Immigrant Parents' Experiences

Race, Class, Language and Culture

Race, social class, and culture are defining factors of minority parent experiences (Auerbach, 2007; Guo, 2006, 2011; Lareau, 2000, 2011; López, 2001; Louie, 2001; Reay, 1998; Valdés, 1996). Students and parents from working class and poor families are at a disadvantage because their values and ways of communicating are not aligned with White middle class norms in schools (Lareau, 2000; 2011; Reay, 1998). Furthermore, many immigrant parents' experiences are subject to the impact of language constraints and cultural divides between home and school (Auerbach, 2007; Guo, 2006, 2011; López, 2001; Louie, 2001; Valdés, 1996).

For example, Auerbach (2007) illustrated how social class, racial background, and immigration status influenced immigrant parent experiences among working class Latino immigrant parents in an urban high school in Los Angeles. In addition to language constraints, these parents experienced discrimination in the broader society, low expectations regarding their children's advancement to college, and limited access to cultural and social capital. Although the parents were all limited in their knowledge and resources regarding college planning, their involvement patterns varied according to their ability and willingness to negotiate their cultural norms, values, and beliefs with those of American schools. While highlighting the within-group variability among working class Latino immigrant parents, Auerbach (2007) also found common factors that impacted their involvement experiences including

family socioeconomic background, parent education history, and interactions with school teachers and staff.

To summarize, minority immigrant parents' experiences are embedded in the social, and cultural context. Social class, racial background, culture, and immigration status shape parents' involvement experiences by determining their access to the financial, cultural and social capital (Auerbach, 2007; Guo, 2006, 2011; Lareau, 2000, 2011; López, 2001; Louie, 2001; Reay, 1998; Valdés, 1996).

Transnationalism

In addition to race, social class, culture, and language, transnationalism constitutes another important factor informing immigrant experiences in the United States. In this section, I review the research on transnationalism and how it informs the present study on Korean immigrant experiences.

According to Morawska (2007), transnationalism is defined as “some combination of plural civic and political memberships, economic involvements, social networks, and cultural identities that reach across and link people and institutions in two or more nation-states in diverse, multilayered patterns” (p. 149). Although encounters among people from different cultures and habits are not a new phenomenon, contemporary migration is distinct in its speed and scope. Eased by technological advancements, people, money, material and non-material products, and information move across national and geographical borders more efficiently and occurs with greater speed and frequency than earlier times (Appadurai, 1996).

Researchers of transnationalism informs immigration acculturation. Some researchers have proposed that affinity and attachment to ethnicity and country of

origin may not necessarily interfere with immigrants' acculturation in the United States (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Levitt and Schiller, 2004). Moving away from assimilation discourse, the researchers have questioned if assimilation or mainstream American culture is necessarily a final destination or desired state of immigrant acculturation for many adult immigrants and possibly their children.

For instance, communication with people in Korea using social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter occurs in real-time. Family and friends in Korea can be reached in no time, at minimal cost. Furthermore, the Korean immigrant community is becoming increasingly transnationalized; recent immigrants no longer consider migration to the United States as a permanent settlement. Min (2013) notes that the "presence of so many international students and other temporary residents, in addition to these young fluently bilingual immigrants, has helped the Korean community maintain far more transnational ties with South Korea than before" (p. 31).

There are scattered research findings that inform the impact of transnationalism among Korean immigrants. Noh, Kwak, and Han (2013) found strong evidences of transnational activities among Koreans living in Toronto, Canada. The respondents to their survey showed attachment to family and personal ties; frequent long distant contacts; resource exchanges and visits across national borders; cultural emotional ties; and capital wealth and property maintained in Korea. Informal social ties were found most frequently with parents and siblings in Korea. Interestingly, Son (2015) reported that identifying with Korean ethnicity was strengthened due to transnational ties among Korean immigrant women in her study.

However, their motivations to acculturate into American society differed according to English proficiency, internet proficiency, and economic resources:

When they had little difficulty with English, were able to utilize the Internet to stay connected with Korean society, and had the economic means to counter unforeseeable life events, acculturation appeared to be a matter of choice. For those without such cultural and economic assets, acculturation is perceived to be what they need to achieve regardless of whether they succeed at it. (para. 32)

Transnationalism can be relevant to the experiences of Korean mothers of elementary and secondary students in the U.S. The mothers may experience transnationalism in different ways, such as through information seeking behaviors, cultural affinities, and decisions about following what they perceive as the “American way of living,” regarding how they raise their children and support their education. Thus, the impact of transnational forces can be a useful lens to understand, interpret, and analyze immigrant parents’ experiences.

Transnationalism can also operate at different level. According to K. Park (2007), Korean immigrants engage in cognitive border-crossing as they compare their social status in the United States vis-à-vis Korea. Korean immigrant women still utilized references to Korea in order to make sense of their experiences in the United States. In some cases, the women referenced their prior educational and social class background (which was higher than their current status) in order to mitigate the downward social mobility that they experienced.

To conclude, current policy guidelines and previously proposed partnership models of parent involvement may not capture all the complexities of immigrant parent involvement. In fact, parent involvement or parent-school partnerships have never been politically and culturally neutral, nor has involvement happened naturally. In particular, the guidelines and partnership model do not adequately consider the important role of the context beyond the school in which minority parents' experiences are embedded. This is particularly true for Korean immigrant parents who must negotiate their values and boundaries in their new country. Their experiences with parenting are inevitably embedded in race, class, language, culture, and transnationalism, which are discussed in more detail in the following section.

Context for the Present Study: Asian American and Korean American Education

Similar to minority immigrant parents, Korean immigrant parents' experiences are impacted by multiple contexts. In this section, I discuss the salience of race, ethnicity, class, and culture in Korean American education using the literature on Asian American and Korean American education. I begin by discussing the racial implications of Asian American educational experiences. Next, I discuss ethnic specific contexts, such as immigration history, Korean education, social class diversity, and ethnic resources.

Asian American Education

As a racial group, Asian Americans have assumed a unique social position in American society. On one hand, they possess White and middle class characteristics. On the other hand, they are still subjected to discrimination in many areas including leadership roles in business, politics, and entertainment. During the Civil Rights

movement, Asian Americans were glorified as an example of a racial minority group that attained the American dream with their strong work ethic and cultural traits such as obedience to authority, which was used as evidence of the end of racism in U.S. society (Chae, 2004; Chun, 1995; Jo, 2004). Seemingly positive and gracious, this model minority stereotype was repudiated by S. J. Lee (1996) as a hegemonic device that pits minority groups against each other. S. J. Lee (1996) contended that the stereotype was used to argue that the lack of a work ethic or cultural values were to blame for non-Asian racial minorities' lower achievement levels in schools and the job market. This, according to S. J. Lee (1996), instigated unnecessary negative perceptions towards Asian Americans from other minorities. The stereotype also presents the false notion that all Asian Americans are supposed to do well in school and engenders psychological pressures upon those who do not fit the generalization.

The model minority construct is highly relevant to the discourse on Asian American education, particularly Asian American parents' school involvement. Asian American parents have been highlighted for their role in their children's educational experiences, but mostly their high level of academic achievement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Asian culture, with its emphasis on education and family support, and a strict and authoritarian way of parenting, has been attributed to their children's academic success. Oftentimes, they have been pictured as strict parents who do not accept anything lower than a grade A, admission to a top-ranked university, and professional occupations such as lawyers and medical doctors (Chua, 2011; Abboud & Kim, 2006). Refuting the culture and individual work-ethics explanation of Asian American families' educational experiences, Sue & Okazaki (1995) use the term

relative functionalism to explain Asian American parents' and their children's focus on education. They invest their resources on education because of the perception that their success in other avenues is limited in U.S. society due to discrimination. In other words, Asian Americans came to believe that education was the most effective tool for upward social mobility. According to relative functionalism, this theory of success led them to invest their resources almost exclusively in education.

In many cases, Asian Americans are viewed as a homogeneous group with stereotypical social features focusing on high achievement in U.S. society. In fact, Asian Americans are a very diverse population with more than 50 ethnic groups and 100 language groups, as well as varied social classes, religions, and immigration backgrounds (Lee & Kumashiro, 2005). Despite this variability, Asian Americans have been agglomerated into one racial category and subjected to the stereotypical image of the model minority. Continuing the labeling, and contrary to the connotations attached to the model minority stereotype, a subgroup of Asian Americans, mostly Southeast Asians Americans and Pacific Islanders, have been described as a low achieving group of Asian Americans (Lee & Kumashiro, 2005). This bimodal definition of achievement among Asian Americans is problematic; it assigns a wholesale characteristic to a diverse group of people merely based on their racial or ethnic background. Furthermore, it also has negative influences on those who do not fit the image of the racial group or the subgroup. Asian Americans as a racial group and its subgroups have been overgeneralized and essentialized in American society.

Korean American population is an ethnic group and is distinct from the racial category of Asian Americans. In the following section, I briefly describe contexts which influence Korean American education.

Korean Immigration to the United States

Korean immigration to the United States has been influenced by several factors, but education has been an important motivation of emigration (Abelmann & Lie, 1995; Min, 2007, 2011; Rhee 2006). In the following two sections, I discuss how Korean immigration has been influenced by the emphasis and value Koreans place on education both in Korea and in the United States

According to Min (2007), Korean immigration to the United States has been influenced by several factors. The first wave of Koreans in the United States worked on plantations in Territorial Hawaii beginning in the early 1900s. Until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, most Koreans in the U.S. were brides of U.S. servicemen, adoptees, and professionals (Min, 2007). After the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which removed geographical quotas limiting immigration from certain countries and continents, and facilitated family reunion, immigration from Korea increased dramatically. Between 1970 and 2000, the Korean American population increased from 70,000 to about 1.1 million, and in 2010, more than 95% of Korean Americans were either post-1965 immigrants or their children (Min, 2013).

Overall, immigrants from Korea have been a self-selected, educated and skilled population (Min, 2013) and more increasingly become so. According to Min (2013), after the Immigration Act of 1990 increased the total number of immigrants and the proportion of immigration for occupational purposes, immigration from

Korea for employment purposes has seen high increases in both number and proportion. In other words, Korean immigrants in the United States are increasingly more self-selected and skilled because their legal stay needs to be sponsored by US employers who need their skills, labor, and/or expertise. Among Korean immigrants, this resulted in a rapid increase in “status adjusters,” those who initially came to the United States for other reasons (e.g., international students) but changed their immigration status for occupational purposes, increasing the number of visas issued based on employment two-fold between 1991 and 1992 (Min, 2013). Between 2005 and 2009, the majority of incoming Korean immigrants arrived for employment purposes (Min, 2013).

The profound influence of the United States in modern Korean history underlies motivation for emigration. Further, Koreans have regarded U.S. education as more desirable than Korean education (Min, 2007, 2011; Rhee 2006). The United States has been part of the social imagination of South Koreans for quite some time. After the end of Japanese annexation from 1910 to 1945, the United States took over the southern portion of Korean peninsula, and the Soviet Union occupied the north. Since an armistice agreement after the Korean War (1950-1953), there has been a strong presence of the United States in the Korean Peninsula in terms of political, military and economic involvement. This heavy involvement of the United States in Korea influenced the immigration of South Koreans into the United States.

U.S. education has been an important factor in the history of Korean immigration. Although anti-United States sentiments exist in response to its political and military involvement in Korea, living in the United States has been regarded

positively among South Koreans in general. Many equate the United States with modernity and believe the country is a land with a higher level of freedom, democracy, and gender equality (Abelmann & Lie, 1995). Education and educational opportunities for children have been a particularly important reason for Korean immigration to the United States. South Koreans' impressions about the United States include a fascination with its education system (Rhee, 2007). The high value of U.S. education, desires for upward social mobility, and relatively more opportunities to be admitted to a prestigious university in the United States provide significant motivations for emigration (Abelmann & Lie, 1995; Min, 2013). According to Min (2013), "better opportunity for their children's college education and their own graduate education is now the most important motivation for Korean's decisions to immigrate to the United States" (p. 15).

Korean Education

Children's education has been central to the Korean mothers' responsibilities. In Korean culture, mothers have assumed the role of managing their children's education. Korean mothers' decisions regarding their children's education is shaped by their own lived experiences and the social settings in which they are embedded. Social and historical contexts influence what education means to Korean mothers (Abelmann, 2003; Park & Abelmann, 2004). An example is the role of the Confucius tradition. Although Korean mothers usually manage the children's education, "[t]he inheritance of Confucianism exists as a form of fathers' authority that frames the lives of women and children" (Cho, 2007, p. 174). Another example is educational "zeal" or "fever," which refers to the extensive attention and resources that Korean parents,

mostly mothers, devote to supporting their children's education (Oh, 2006; Seth, 2002, 2012). In South Korea, society has historically equated educational attainment with social success. Furthermore, the family as a unit of social competition has worked collectively to support the educational success of children as a means of upward social mobility (Oh, 2006). This concentrated investment in children's education is still relevant to the contemporary experiences of Korean families.

The type of Korean education between the 1970s and 1990s that the present study's participants experienced is characterized by a high social demand for educational opportunities and "the enormous financial burden it places on students and their families' and the willingness of those families to bear that burden" (Seth, 2012, p. 20). Although the public education system in Korea sought to bring equalization, Korean society has remained rank-conscious (Seth, 2012). In a highly stratified higher education system, Korean students have struggled to enter into one of only a handful of universities with high social prestige. In the meantime, the Korean government's deregulation of the private education market allowed the private education industry to burgeon, but with varying degree of quality and costs (M. Kim, 2012; S. J. Park, 2012). In the midst of this thriving market for private education and the highly competitive nature of college admission, Korean mothers have increasingly felt confused and anxious; furthermore, they feel a heightened sense of responsibility over managing their children's education (S. J. Park, 2012).

Korean American Education and Ethnic Resources

The ways in which Korean American/immigrant parents are involved in their children's education vary according to social class backgrounds of the families and their access to and engagement with ethnic resources.

Overall, Asian American parents' involvement, which include their expectations and communication with their children, has been identified as a strong indicator of academic achievement among Asian American children in general (Nguyen, You & Ho, 2009). Korean parents specifically showed higher levels of education, higher socioeconomic status, and higher expectations about children's academic achievement among subgroups of Asian Americans (Goyette & Xie, 1999). In both studies, Korean parents were regarded as an ethnic group that shared commonalities.

In her survey of Korean American middle school students and their parents, E. Kim (2002) found that Korean American parents' education levels, expectations, communication with their children, homework checking, television rules, and going-out rules were positively and significantly related to their children's educational achievement. E. Kim (2002) found that another positive and significant factor was the level of Korean parents' English proficiency. The family income and school participation (school contact and PTA participation) did not show a significant correlation with academic achievement. E. Kim (2002) concluded that "parent involvement as a form of social capital mediates the relationship between parental financial and human capital and the recreated human capital of Korean-American children" (p. 536).

Several researchers have shown that Korean parents' high expectations and emphasis on academic achievement are actualized thanks to the resources that were available in Korean ethnic economy and community (Lew, 2006; J.J. Park, 2012; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Ethnic churches and private supplementary education have been significant resources that helped transform the families' cultural values into viable support. In churches, first-generation Korean immigrant adults reinforced the importance of education to later generations. *Hagwons*, or cram schools, are "private businesses established and operated by Korean immigrant entrepreneurs to meet an ethnic-specific demand carried over from Korea" (Zhou & Kim, 2006, p. 15) and provided academic skills and content instruction to Korean American children. Overall, the ethnic resources created "a social environment conducive to educational achievement" (Zhou & Kim, 2006, p. 6).

Access to ethnic resources such as church network and *hagwons* was found to vary according to the social class backgrounds of Korean families. While both middle-class and working-class Korean immigrant parents have constraints due to their limited English proficiency and limited knowledge of the American education system, middle-class parents mitigate the disadvantages due to language constraints more successfully than their working-class peers using their financial and social capital (Lew, 2006). However, ethnic social structures, such as churches and SAT preparatory *hagwons*, still benefit lower class Korean students and their families because they provide a space where educational information is actively exchanged and shared across social class backgrounds (J.J. Park, 2012).

To conclude, ethnic churches and *hagwons* provide a significant source of content instruction outside school classrooms and social networks that have shown to mitigate the negative impact of having a lower social class background. These support systems allow recent immigrants to obtain information and know-how from those who have come before them. In sum, these structural conditions, combined with a cultural emphasis on education, create the basis for a positive learning environment.

Studies on Korean Immigrant Mothers' Parental Involvement Experiences

Several studies that have examined Korean immigrant mothers' involvement in school settings have focused on the difference between schools/teachers/administrators and the mothers. All parties understand the parent's role differently, and often misconceptions arise (Kwon et al., 2010; Yang & McMullen, 2003). Korean mothers' attempts to provide educational support for their children have been challenged by several factors, including language barriers, cultural differences and structural barriers (Kwon et al., 2010; Sohn & Wang, 2006; S. Lee, 2005; Yang & McMullen, 2003).

Language constraints have been cited as one of the most frequently-mentioned factors that hinder mothers' active participation in teacher-parent interaction and school events. For example, Korean immigrant mothers may not be familiar with rules of taking turns and other implicit rule of communication (S. Lee, 2005) and have limited knowledge of educational terms (Sohn & Wang, 2006). Some of them also prefer written communication (i.e., emails) and individual interaction (i.e., one-on-one conversation with teachers) rather than verbal interaction and group settings (i.e., PTA meetings) (Yang & McMullen, 2003).

Language-related structural barriers such as limited translation services can be another interference with Korean-American mothers' participation in their children's education. For example, in a Korean-English dual immersion program in S. Lee's (2005) study, the official language of PTA meetings was changed from Korean to English immediately after an English-speaking mother joined the meeting. This left Korean speaking mothers feeling marginalized because their language needs were not met by the school even when they were a numerical majority in the meetings.

In addition to language constraints, cultural differences is another important factor impacting parent involvement in educational activities (Kwon et al., 2010; Yang & McMullen, 2003). While Korean immigrant mothers are positive about collaborative relationships with teachers, some of them expressed unfamiliarity and discomfort with their newly expected roles as equal partners. Their discomfort might have been due to a Korean cultural custom that many Korean immigrant mothers consider expressing concerns as being disrespectful. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions about Korean mothers were inconsistent. While American teachers perceived the mothers as being respectful and deferring to authority, they also described the mothers as excessively focusing on academic learning and mastery of English language of their children (Kwon et al., 2010; Yang & McMullen, 2003). However, a survey of Korean mothers of elementary students reported it was not the case (Kwon et al., 2010). Yang and McMullen (2003) suggested this misunderstanding might be due to the mothers' preference of one-on-one interaction with the teachers due to their lack of confidence in speaking English in group settings. Also, the mothers' interests in academic and English development of the children

were not surprising because they believed academic achievement and English proficiency would lead the children to better jobs in the future; indeed, they were attracted to American education because it would guarantee their children's English language development.

In addition to Korean mothers' involvement in school settings, a few studies (Cho, 2007; J. Kim 2011; Yang & Rettig, 2005) have looked into Korean immigrant mothers' experiences providing educational support to their children beyond school context.

Yang and Rettig (2005) interviewed seventeen Korean immigrant mothers of adolescent children in the Midwest about their ideas and experiences regarding their children's "academic success." Using phenomenological analysis, the authors described the mothers' perspectives on their experiences as a family member, an individual, and a member of the Korean American community. The mothers in the study grappled with balancing between their Korean way of parenting and their children's American way of thinking. They called their high level of academic expectations and childrearing style as "the Korean way," and tried to negotiate it with their new cultural reality in the United States. During the adjustment and negotiation, they underwent some emotional challenges as well. They felt guilty about not being able to help their children navigate American society because of their limited language competence, know-how, or unfamiliarity with the system. While the mothers were aware of discrimination against their children, they found they were not able to do much to help their children address the issue. They also regarded discrimination as a natural process of being a minority in the United States. Notably,

the mothers reported their own transformations after experiencing resistance from their children. They became “more accepting and encouraging” and “revised value priorities of love, respect, and harmony, along with academic success” (Yang & Rettig, 2005, p. 71).

Interestingly, the co-ethnic social network among fellow Korean American families had a negative impact on the mothers’ behaviors and psychological well-being in the study (Yang & Rettig, 2005). Mothers in the study reported constant comparison and competition with other families regarding their children’s academic achievement. “The pursuit of academic success involved comparisons and competitions among Korean-American parents in the social system, instead of cooperation and support. Mothers revealed the rivalry” (Yang & Rettig, 2005, p. 63). They did not share their difficulties with others fearing rumors, which also exacerbated their feeling of loneliness.

Cho (2007) interviewed ten Korean women who came to the United States for the educational purposes of their child, spouse, or themselves, with at least one child in secondary school. Mothers had lived in the United States for 7 to 20 years. The findings show that although physically absent, the fathers’ beliefs influenced the wives’ educational practices. Furthermore, among the important factors that influenced the ways the mothers helped their children’s work included the “women’s abilities in subject matters and in English, children’s growth and development, and family’s material and time resources” (p. 164) and “the mother-child relationships and family conditions” (p. 167). Interestingly, the mothers differentiated between homework assigned by teachers and “home work” (p. 154) that they expected their

children to do outside schools for the purpose of achieving higher academic achievement. Cho (2007) found that the mothers were less involved in the homework based on a belief that “schools have the authority to inculcate both academic skills and moral development into children” (p. 169), but also “showed enthusiasm on home work (*gong-boo*) when focused on academic achievement” (p. 167) and stayed close to their children for parenting and educational purposes. This suggests that the schools may not see and recognize the mothers’ selective educational support easily, because it does not occur within the boundary of schools.

J. Kim (2011) interviewed mothers and grandmothers of Korean pre-kindergartners and their teachers and staff members in a Korean heritage language school in the Southeast United States. The author found that the heritage language school fulfilled three roles. In addition to a place that helped Korean children maintain their linguistic heritage, the language school was a “social and emotional shelter” (p.135) for the children and provided “strong social and emotional support systems” (p.135), which they could not get in formal schools. The mothers also considered the language school as a safety net in case the child failed to incorporate into the host society. Although J. Kim (2011) did not focus on the mothers’ experiences, the mothers’ own experiences of barriers informed their decision regarding their children’s socialization and education. The metaphor of the “salmon’s cycle” (p. 138) that one mother used poignantly described the older children in Korean immigrant families who went to the mainstream society but had to return to their ethnic community because they failed to incorporate successfully. The mothers reported that they had to consider and prepare for the possibility their children may

fail to adjust (J. Kim, 2011). The Korean immigrant mothers in the study were aware of discrimination against racial minorities in American society, and they viewed the role of Korean heritage language school as a safety net.

The studies reviewed thus far have described the involvement experiences of Korean immigrant mothers within and outside school settings. The mothers continually negotiated their educational expectations and beliefs, which were largely formed in and carried from South Korea, with the new system of culture and values in U.S. schools and society. Most of the studies focused on the difficulties the mothers experienced when they tried to communicate with the teachers and their concerns about their children's experiences at school. The most frequently identified factor causing difficulties was language barriers, including frustration from the inability to communicate with the teachers as much as they wanted, limited knowledge of educational terms, and different norms of communicating and participating between Korean and American cultures. Korean sociocultural norms, such as respecting the teachers' authority and deferring to them, were sometimes viewed as not being assertive and cooperative. Some mothers acknowledged the importance of being proactive and tried to initiate more interaction. This resulted mostly in more understanding between the mothers and teachers. The researchers commonly emphasized that the conceptualization of Korean immigrant mothers' involvement should not be based on American norms, most notably represented by physical presence in schools and participation in PTA.

The role of ethnic social networks, however, was not uniformly positive and beneficial; in fact, co-ethnic social ties became a source of emotional distress and

tension in some families (Yang & Rettig, 2005). Yang and Rettig (2005) suggested that the rivalry among fellow Korean Americans might reflect the high competition that is evident in South Korean education. Education zeal, a phenomenon where South Korean parents compete with other families by investing and dedicating concentrated resources to their children's education (Oh, 2006), is a distinctive characteristic of South Korean society. Having grown up in Korea and experienced its education system, Korean immigrant mothers in the United States are not free from the concept of competition when it comes to their children's academic achievement.

Based on reviewing empirical studies on Korean mothers' experiences, I identified gaps in the literature regarding Korean mother's involvement in their children's American educational experiences. First, research studies on Korean mothers in the United States to date overlooked the importance of parents' pre-migration experiences and the ongoing influence of their dual frame of reference. Most research studies segmented the Korean parents' and mothers' lives rather than viewed them from a holistic perspective. Thus, our understanding of their involvement experiences will be enhanced by studies that encompass their lived experiences before and after migration to the United States. Second, the studies to date have not necessarily focused on the role of social, cultural, and historical context and ethnic community. More attention is needed on the multiple contextual layers in which the mothers' experiences are embedded, such as the local context that influences the specific population (e.g., a county where the Korean population is concentrated and therefore has access to ethnic churches and supplementary educational services). Lastly, a more nuanced description and analysis of within-

group variations, e.g. according to social class and the length of residence in the United States, will increase our understanding of Korean parental involvement. In the next section, I describe the conceptual framework that I use to guide my study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the present study is informed by multiple concepts and frameworks: the parent role construction of Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005); the minority parent role construction of Auerbach (2007); Cultural Ecological Theory (Ogbu & Simons, 1998); and transnationalism (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Portes, 2003). Informed by these concepts and frameworks, I highlight the salience of race, class, ethnicity, and transnationalism in understanding Korean immigrant mothers' experiences with supporting their children's education. My framework also helps me understand, interpret, and analyze mothers' experiences, which are embedded in multiple contextual layers, such as individuals, family, community, and society. In total, this embedded-ness helps unpack the variability within the population.

Parent role construction for involvement defined by Hoover-Dempsey and others (2005) is a useful concept for understanding and interpreting Korean immigrant mothers' parent experiences because it considers the parents' perspectives and the social nature of role construction. They defined role construction as "parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and the patterns of parental behavior that follow those beliefs" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p.107). According to the authors, three factors influence this role construction. The first pertains to parents' beliefs about child development, parenting,

and home-based support for schooling. The second factor is social forces. Here, the parents' role construction is influenced by people and groups that are important to parents through their expectations about the parents' roles. Lastly, role construction "is created from parents' experiences over time with individuals and groups related to schooling" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 108), such as the parents' teachers, the child's previous and current teachers, and other parents. Due to the social nature of the creation, parents' role construction for involvement can change over time as it is influenced by social conditions and self-efforts.

Auerbach (2007) adopted this concept of parent role construction and further elaborated that "parent roles in education are fundamentally (a) socially structured by class and race but also (b) culturally mediated by particular cultural schemas and scripts as well as (c) psychosocially enacted according to individual psychosocial resources and relationships within families" (p. 254). By focusing on the social and cultural conditions specific to minority parents, Auerbach's (2007) framework provides a useful lens to look at Korean immigrant mothers' experiences in social and cultural contexts.

One of the most widely and frequently used frameworks in the studies on immigrant experiences, the Cultural Ecological Theory (CET) (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) is useful to examining the role of ethnic community (Lew, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Carter, 2005; S. Lee, 1996; Valdés, 1996). To explain differences in school performance among minority groups, Ogbu argued that minority students' academic achievement is determined by two major factors: "the system" and "the community forces" (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 158). The system

refers to institutionalized discriminatory practices of the larger society and school whereas the community forces are the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the minority community in response to the negative influences that originate from the system. According to the CET, different minority groups have created varying patterns of community forces. This variability explains distinctive patterns of minority achievement. As voluntary immigrants, Asian immigrants to the United States experienced a relatively short history of discrimination, and they have a more optimistic forecast for the future and more positive attitudes toward education and school than their involuntary immigrant counterparts. Hence they have higher academic achievement than children of involuntary immigrants.

Despite significant implications regarding the broader differences among immigrants, the role of community forces in the CET needs to be reexamined, because it does not explain the within-group variation based on structural factors such as social class (Louie, 2001). Another limitation of the CET is that it does not recognize the role of the parents' transnational engagement before and after immigrating to the host country (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Portes, 2003). Although the CET mentions the positive role of a "dual frame of reference" of immigrant minorities in home country and the host country, it fails to acknowledge the role of pre-migration and transnational activities in shaping immigrant minorities' experiences. The CET places more emphasis on the social incorporation process than what the immigrant minority already possessed and brought with them to the host country.

As an important context for immigrant experiences, transnationalism addresses one of the limitations of the CET. Transnationalism captures pre-migration experiences in Korea and on-going interactions with people, culture, and society in Korea. For the present study, I adopt the following conclusions of transnationalism from Portes (2003). Despite the varieties in terms of scope, topics, and population in research on transnationalism, a general consensus exists among studies on immigrant transnationalism that it is a new way of looking at movement and interactions between two countries because it is happening at unprecedented speed, frequency, and convenience due to technological developments. Transnationalism is also performed mostly by individuals not as an institutionalized effort and some variability exists among immigrant in the ways in which they participate in transnationalism. Finally, depending on the Korean and American contexts in which individual immigrants are situated, transnational activities can vary.

To conclude, informed by the social nature of parent role construction (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005); the social and cultural contexts in which minority parents' experiences are embedded (Auerbach, 2007); Cultural Ecological Theory (Ogbu & Simons, 1998); and the salience of transnationalism in immigrant experiences (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Portes, 2003), I approached the present study with the following perspectives.

1. Korean immigrant mothers' educational beliefs, perceptions and behaviors are influenced by:
 - a. prior experiences in Korea and in the United States;
 - b. ongoing transnational engagements including the two contexts;

- c. people and contexts important to the mothers;
 - d. multiple contextual layers – micro, meso, macro and transnational.
2. Race, class, ethnicity, language, culture, and immigration are all salient in understanding, interpreting and analyzing the mothers' experiences

Figure 1 and Figure 2 are graphic representations of this conceptual framework.

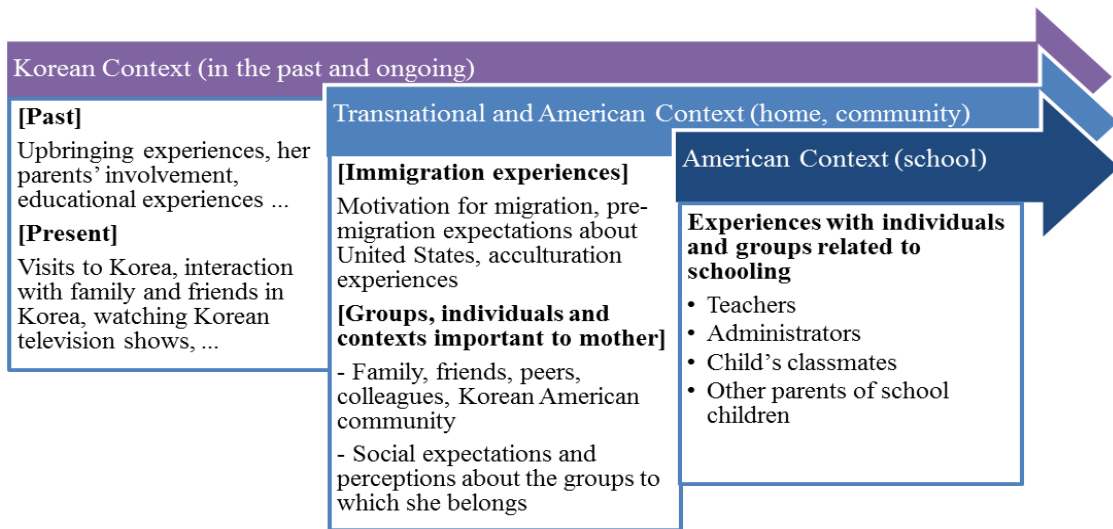


Figure 1. Factors influencing Korean immigrant mother's educational beliefs, perceptions and behaviors

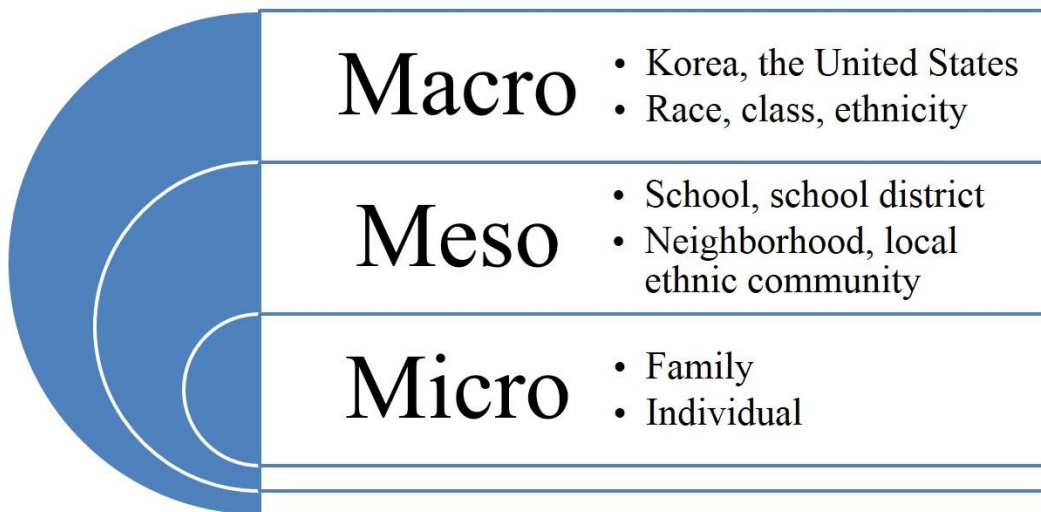


Figure 2. Multiple contextual layers of Korean immigrant mothers' experiences

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a context for the present study by situating Korean immigrant mothers' experiences in the literature. I showed the salience of race, ethnicity, class, and immigration in the mothers' experiences by reviewing selective studies on minority immigrant parents. Next, I described contexts specific to Korean immigrant mothers' experiences and reviewed studies on their involvement and support in relation to their children's education. Based on the gap I found in the reviewed studies, I established the needs for my study. Finally, I described a conceptual framework for the study that drew from multiple concepts and frameworks on minority immigrant experiences. In the following chapter, I describe the present study's methodology and research design.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

This study is designed to provide insights into the parental involvement experiences of Korean mothers in the United States. In this chapter, I describe the research methodology and processes used to answer the research questions. Specifically, I describe the study's context and participants, data collection and data analysis. Finally, I describe ways to address the validity and reliability issues.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do four Korean immigrant mothers understand and perform their roles in the educational experiences of their children?
2. How do contexts (i.e. micro, meso, macro, and transnational) influence the mothers' understandings and performance of their roles in the educational experiences of their children?

Research Methodology

The present study is comprised of four case studies of Korean immigrant mothers' experiences with parenting. Major sources of data are semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participant observations. A questionnaire was used to gather demographic information, as well as background information regarding the children and their education.

I chose the study's particular methodology and methods for several reasons. First, qualitative studies aid scholars and practitioners in "understanding the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they

are involved with or engage in ...understanding the particular *context* within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions ... understanding the *process* by which events and actions take place” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22-23, emphasis added). For these reasons, qualitative research meets the research goals of the present study; indeed, it seeks to understand how the participants view their roles in their children’s education and how the contexts of their migration in the United States and transnationalism influence their experiences with their children’s education.

Second, as “an in-depth analysis of one or more events, settings, programs, social groups, communities, individuals, or other ‘bounded systems’” (McMillan, 2004, p. 271), the case study approach is useful for gaining a deep understanding, mostly in a natural setting, from the participants’ perspectives (Gall et al., 1996; McMillan, 2004). The case study method is appropriate for the present work because I aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of each participant’s experiences regarding the support they provide for their children’s education from their perspective Korean immigrant mothers. I also chose case study method because it allows for “a broad exploratory beginnings” and then “more directed data collection and analysis” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 59). In the early stage of data collection, I intended my data collection to be explorative because there were few previous studies specifically on this topic. I did not confine my participants’ involvement into a certain list of behaviors nor did I delineated boundaries and contexts of their experiences. After initial encounter or interview with each participant, I asked more specific questions based on the first interviews. Data analysis became more and more focused and

directed based on preliminary findings. Thus, using a case study method, I remained flexible and open to possible themes in the beginning and became more focused and directed in later stages of research.

Third, participant observation was used to characterize the natural setting of data collection. When I was recruiting participants, I found asking potential respondents for their time to participate in a study was quite challenging, because the mothers' and children's schedules were very busy. Therefore, I assured each family that the study would not require a significant time commitment. Given that I had limited time to spend with the family, the rapport that I could establish was limited. Thus, I decided to engage myself in the families' activities, working simultaneously to build rapport and observe them. I also chose participant observation, because I found it unnatural and awkward to observe people and not engage with them. I believe that interacting would yield more meaningful data by creating a more natural setting.

Finally, in-depth individual interviews are also suitable for the present study, because interviews provide the participants' account of their own experiences. Semi-structured interview questions are "open-ended yet specific in intent, allowing individual responses, ... and allow for probing, follow-up, and clarification" (McMillan, 2004, p. 168). The semi-structured interview "has the advantage of providing reasonably standard data across respondents, but of greater depth than can be obtained from a structured interview" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 310). In contrast, structured interviews use closed-ended questions and do not allow the interviewer the freedom to follow-up and clarify answers. The semi-structured

interview format is suitable for the present study, because it allows room for individual responses on participants' own terms, while also ensuring that responses are not overly wide-ranging thanks to the prepared questions. Also, it allows an in-depth examination of the participants' experiences, because the interviewer can probe, follow-up, and clarify the respondents' descriptions of their feelings and thoughts. For the present study, I prepared a list of open-ended questions that I designed to elicit responses about the participants' beliefs, values, perspectives, expectations, and experiences. To crosscheck responses, I asked more than one question to probe each topic of interest.

Context of the Study

I chose to conduct this study in Washington County (pseudonym) because the county has a concentrated Korean population and is well-known for its quality public schools, a desired characteristic for Korean immigrant families. Washington County has a concentrated Asian population including Koreans. According to 2009-2013 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), Asians as a racial group comprised 17.9% of the county population, compared to the state average of 5.7% and the national average of 4.9%; Koreans comprised 3.6% of the total population in Washington County, which is much higher than 0.9% in the state and 0.5% in the nation. Koreans were the second largest Asian sub-group after Asian Indians, who comprised 4.1% of the county's population.

Washington County is also well-known for its quality public schools. The schools' national reputation draws many Korean immigrants with school-aged children to this area and is well-known to many Korean parents in Korea as well. The

availability of government jobs and the concentration of higher education institutions also attract Korean immigrants. The size of the Korean communities in the area, which is the third largest in the United States, also allows ethnic businesses to burgeon and adds to the attractiveness of the area to Koreans, many of whom seek ethnic foods and other cultural products.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

In this section, I describe how I chose the participants for the present study and how I invited them to participate. I also briefly describe their backgrounds.

Four mothers participated in the present study: Mrs. J, Mrs. K, Mrs. Y, and Mrs. S. To recruit and select participants, I cast a wide net to find mothers who would be willing to open their houses and commit time for interview and observation. The criteria for participation included having at least one child between preschool and 3rd grade; the mother must have received most of her formal education in Korea; she would not consider herself, or be considered by others, a *kiroki* mother whose purpose for staying in the United States was exclusively for her children's education and whose spouse stayed in Korea. These criteria were decided for several reasons. First, the age range of the child was determined to be the lower grades in elementary school, because those tend to be the years when parents/mothers are involved relatively more compared to the higher grades. Second, the location of the mothers' educational experience was delineated in order to create a level of consistency in the role the Korean educational experiences play in the mothers' current practices. Third, I controlled the immigration status of the mothers in order to ensure a level of consistency in terms of how permanent the mothers viewed their settlement in the

United States. I did not, however, make a restriction based on any siblings that were either younger or older than the range of interest. Therefore, Mrs. J, Mrs. K, and Mrs. S, who had older children, had more experience being a parent than Mrs. Y, whose first child was in first grade and the second was still in pre-school.

In the spring and summer of 2013, I recruited Mrs. J and Mrs. Y using my personal and professional networks. Mrs. S and Mrs. K were recruited by the snowball method in the summer of 2013 and spring of 2014, respectively. Mrs. J was a fellow member of a Buddhist organization with which I was affiliated, and Mrs. Y was a former colleague at a nonprofit youth organization that served the local Korean American community. Mrs. J recommended Mrs. S, whose children attended the same book club. Mrs. S then referred Mrs. K, who was a friend of hers from church. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the participants, which was gathered through a Background Information Sheet (see Appendix A and B) and individual interviews. More background information is described in detail in Chapter Five.

Table 1: Participants' demographic information

	Mrs. J	Mrs. K	Mrs. Y	Mrs. S
Age	46	44	38	41
Marriage	Married	Married	Married	Married
Current Occupation	Full-time mother	Full-time office worker	Full-time government employee, part time private college counselor	Full-time mother
Past occupation	Bilingual special education teacher	Tutor, academic counselor at a learning center	Director and instructor of hagwon, tutor, non-profit community based organization	Pharmacist
Spouse occupation	Engineer	Instructor	Finance manager	Dentist
Religion	Catholic	Protestant	Protestant	Protestant
Years in the United States	15	19	19	14
Reason for immigration	Employment, marriage	Graduate education of spouse and herself	Undergraduate education	Graduate education of spouse
Years in current county (state)	4	10	2 (6)	6
Reason for moving to current residence	Children's education	Spouse's job	Children's education and other benefits	Spouse's job, Children's education
English proficiency (Self-report)	Beginning to intermediate	Intermediate	Fluent	Intermediate
Education	Graduate degree	Some graduate education	Graduate degree	Graduate degree
Education of spouse	Graduate degree	Graduate degree	Graduate degree	Graduate degree
Education in the United States	N/A	Some graduate-level courses	Post-secondary education	Graduate program (long-distance)
Family income¹	\$100,000 +	\$50,000-\$100,000	\$100,000 +	\$100,000 +
Family composition	Nuclear	Nuclear	Extended (father, mother, sister, brother-in-law)	Nuclear

¹ The three out of four families in the present study reported that their family incomes were higher than \$100,000. The fact that two of the families had four children complicates the relationship between family income and social class. Considering the high cost of living in the area that the families resided, \$100,000 might not be an appropriate lowest end of family income for upper middle class.

No. of children	4	3	2	4
Children grade/age	6th, 4th, 3rd, Pre (3 yrs.)	9th, 3rd, 3rd	1st, Pre (4 yrs.)	6th, 4th, 2nd, 2 yrs. (not in school)
Children gender	F, F, F, M	M, M, F	M, F	M, F, M, M

Data Collection

In this section, I start by describing the overall data collection process and provide more details according to each data format.

The data was collected over the course of ten months and occurred between June and October 2013 for Mrs. J, Mrs. Y, and Mrs. S. Following this effort, Mrs. K was recruited in March 2014 in order to provide additional data. The data collection process for her was conducted in March and April 2014. An additional participant with whom I conducted interview and participant observation was dropped after a preliminary data analysis. She was eliminated because she lived in a different county with a small Korean population, and she was relatively younger and immigrated more recently compared to the other mothers.

Overall, the interview data comprised a total of sixteen hours of interviews and observations, equating to three to six hours per participants, and one to three and a half hours per interview. At least two hours of participant observation was conducted at each home. During the participant observation, at least one child was present, with most of the other children present as well. In some cases, other family members were present during some parts of the interview and observation. For example, Mrs. Y's mother came and went while I talked with Mrs. Y, and I eventually talked with her mother informally about her mothering experiences. I also

observed Mrs. J and her children in our Buddhist meetings occasionally, and Mrs. J and Mrs. S invited me to a lunch with their children at a restaurant on one occasion.

The primary language of communication with the participants was Korean. During the participant observation, I followed the language the family used. For example, in Mrs. S's house, where Korean was used most of the time when communicating with the children, I used Korean as the primary language when interacting with them. In Mrs. K's house, where both Korean and English were used to communicate with the children, I did the same.

Interview

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews twice with each participant at her residence. The interview session lasted one to three and a half hours depending on availability and circumstances. The atmosphere during each interview was mostly relaxed and comfortable. The sessions were more like conversations with organic dialogue. In other words, I did not follow the order of the questions strictly, but rather let the conversation flow according to the topics raised by either the participant or myself. I intended the interviews to be as natural and informal as possible in order to solicit candid responses. I was careful to cover the overall content of the questions listed on the interview protocol during the interviews (See Appendix C for Interview Protocol). The level of rapport I established with each participant affected the level of comfort I sensed. I felt most comfortable interviewing Mrs. Y, then Mrs. J, and then Mrs. K. Mrs. S was the mother to whom I felt least connected possibly because I did not build enough rapport with her before I interviewed her. Even though there was

not a deep level of rapport created with Mrs. K either, I was more experienced with doing fieldwork and felt more comfortable at the home visit by the time I visited her.

After each first visit, I recorded what occurred during the visit using a digital recorder. In addition to describing the encounter, I added my interpretations of the interview and observation. I also wrote field notes every time I conducted fieldwork. Based on the field notes and reflections after the first visit, I created questions for clarification purposes and/or in order to delve into some aspects of their responses in the first interview.

Participant Observation

The observation sessions lasted at least two hours; in addition, I had several occasions during which I observed the children of Mrs. Y and Mrs. J outside their home before and during the data collection period. When I was at the participants' houses, I was involved in the same activity in which the participant and her children (and sometimes other family members) were engaged. For example, I talked with them, prepared and ate dinner, and played with the children. When I spoke, I shared my experiences and provided my thoughts and opinions about what the mother said or about common experiences that we had, in addition to asking follow-up questions to ensure the conversation was as authentic and organic as possible. The mothers also asked me questions about my personal background, graduate school experiences, and other topics. In most cases, I felt like a family friend coming over for a tea or a meal to their homes.

Field Notes

During the fieldwork, I recorded descriptive and reflective field notes. I took notes during the interviews in order to capture important points that I did not want to forget. I took minimal notes during participant observation while I was engaging in the activity (e.g., eating dinner), and because I observed that taking notes drew some of the children's attention at Mrs. S's house. After each visit, I recorded descriptive, analytical and reflective field notes while I drove home. I transcribed the notes, expanded my observations, and added more reflections, or as McMillan (2004, p. 264) characterized, "...researcher speculations, feelings, interpretations, ideas, hunches, and impressions." These post-interview field notes also included "observer comments" or "thoughts about emerging themes and patterns, thoughts about methodological problems or issues, considerations of ethical concerns, and introspective discussions about researcher opinions, attitudes, and prejudices" (McMillan, 2004, p. 264). Most of the field notes were written in English, but I also used Korean when it came more naturally.

Data Analysis

In this section, I first describe how I transcribed the interview data and which language I used during the analysis. Then, I describe how I coded the data, organized the codes, and identified emergent themes.

Transcribing

I transcribed three interview recordings, and the remaining five were transcribed by paid Korean graduate students. These assistants were students of a Women's Studies professor in Korea and had experience with transcribing for their

own research projects. I crosschecked the transcripts, especially for English vocabulary that was not necessarily familiar to the transcribers. Transcripts were stored digitally as MS Word files and in the qualitative data analysis software program ATLAS.ti.

Coding and Thematizing

The interview transcripts were analyzed in Korean language data. The transcripts were not translated into English until they were quoted in the present paper. This allowed me to keep the original sense of the data as much as possible during the analysis process.

I first coded the data by participant. I used both ATLAS.ti and a traditional pen and paper method. First, on hard copies of transcripts and field notes, I started open coding by highlighting and underlying quotes. I also wrote analytic memos in the margins (See Appendix D). These codes and memos were transferred to ATLAS.ti and expanded during the second round of analysis (See Appendix E). Coding the data manually improved the quality of data analysis as I was able to engage more deeply with the data. ATLAS.ti was useful because it allowed me to organize and retrieve the quotes according to codes. For example, I was able to gather all the quotes that I had coded under a certain code, for example, “attitudes/perceptions about other KI (Korean immigrant) mothers.” This way, I could read through them to study the characteristics and dimensions of the code. Themes also emerged from this process of reviewing the quotes and studying the relationship among codes and quotes.

I used both deductive and inductive codes. I prepared a list of deductive codes before I collected the data, including terms such as *transnationalism*, *school-based involvement*, and *home-based involvement*. These codes resulted from a literature review and pilot study and therefore represented concepts about which I was interested in knowing more and those I regarded important in my examining of Korean immigrant mothers' experiences. Before and as I embarked on data collection in the summer of 2013, I made a list of those codes. I referred to them to remind me of the deductive codes, what I would like to see in the data, and how I understood the problem.

I also inductively developed codes as I reviewed the data. Using an open coding method, I first listed more than 100 codes in a single case. Thereafter, I made a tree structure with supercodes and subcodes for some of the codes. As a result, some of the codes were organized into families or groups of codes that fall under a more abstract or inclusive code. For example, the code "mom" had subcodes such as "mom: educational experience" and "mom: personality." I also included the definition of the code, such as "refers to the educational experience of mom. Excludes educational experience of other people" for "mom: educational experience."

Thematizing occurred at various stages of the data analysis. As I coded and wrote analytic memos, I saw patterns emerging that ran through the quotes, codes, and the memos. After coding was complete, I started to write paragraphs with relevant quotes, which sometimes led to emergent themes. As I tried to identify themes, I compared "different pieces of data for similarities and differences" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 69) constantly and repeatedly. I also actively looked for

negative cases evolving from the data that might be incongruent with the themes that I developed. In this process, writing analytical memos was critical for verbalizing and elaborating my ideas. I wrote memos as early as I was writing field notes right after fieldwork and wrote them continually as I engaged more with analyzing the data.

Cross-case analysis occurred during and after I analyzed individual cases. As I analyzed the individual cases, I made a separate list of codes and themes that seemed relevant to other cases. After the individual analysis, I reviewed those cross-case themes and expanded them with evidence from the data. Furthermore, cross-case themes were concretized during and after I wrote up findings for each case.

Overall, the analysis involved going over the data multiple times until I reached a certain level of theoretical saturation or “when no new or relevant data are emerging relevant to an established coding category, no additional categories appear to be necessary to account for the phenomena of interest, and the relationships among categories appear to be well established” (Gall et al., 1996, p. 567). In addition, the data analysis was a recursive process, one in which I went back and forth between the data, literature, discussions, and reflections. As themes emerged and a certain level of saturation was achieved, I looked for connections between the findings and the literature. When necessary, I searched and studied additional literature that helped me understand the findings. I also revisited the data to look for evidence of patterns and negative cases. Reflecting on my own experiences of having grown up and received formal education in South Korea occurred naturally as I engaged with the data by thinking deeply about the patterns and contexts.

Validity

To address validity issues, I disclose my background that may influence the lens that I use when I perceive, interpret, understand, analyze, and discuss the data and the findings. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. In addition, I carefully examined negative cases that might contradict the findings and themes that were emerging. I also compared and contrasted the participants' accounts at several points, using both interview transcripts and observations. I acknowledged multivocality, however, which refers to "the fact that, in many settings, participants do not speak with a unified voice" (Gall et al., 1996, p. 573). Therefore, I was open to possible incongruence in the data, while carefully examining whether the inconsistency had a meaning. Overall, I constantly thought about possible sources of errors or biases and tried to address them. I discussed my interpretations of the data with my dissertation committee chair, other graduate students, and other Korean immigrants.

Limitations of the Study

The present study does not aim to draw a generalization about Korean immigrant mothers. Therefore, I do not conclude that the themes across the cases represent the larger population. The themes will only account for the specific cases of the present study, although they can shed light on further endeavors to understand the larger group of Korean mothers in different settings.

With this delimitation in mind, there are several limitations of the study. First, the findings and analysis of the study heavily relied on the interviews with the mothers and three sessions of participant observation. The self-reported beliefs,

ideologies, and behaviors could be triangulated by more observation data of the mothers' interactions with their children and participant reviews of their transcripts. Two of the participants reviewed their transcripts, but I did not have a chance to discuss my findings and conclusions with them. This presents a limitation that there could be a gap between my interpretation of the data and the participants' intentions.

Second, the level of rapport that I established with participants varied and has the potential to impact the findings and results. The stronger and deeper the rapport I had, the richer and the deeper were the data, as is the case with Mrs. Y and Mrs. J. Although asking the mothers to share additional time was quite challenging due to their already busy schedules, spending more time with Mrs. K and Mrs. S might have allowed me to collect more data on their contexts, especially on their experiences during their own upbringing and relationships with their parents.

Summary

The present study is designed to provide insights into how Korean immigrant mothers support their children's education and how they make sense of their own experiences. Four Korean mothers participated in in-depth interviews and participant observation, data collection methods that were designed to investigate their beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding their children's education and their prior experiences in Korea and in the United States. The resulting data were transcribed and analyzed first by participant and then by theme. In the next chapter, I provide my background and discuss how it might influence the research process.

Chapter 4: The Researcher

In this chapter, I introduce my own immigration narrative and educational experiences and note how they are connected to those of my participants as well as the manner in which I approached the study. Reflecting upon my experiences was a salient step in the research process, because the researcher acts as a tool that collects, interprets and analyzes the data in qualitative research. By discussing my background, I acknowledge that my own personal experiences influence how I viewed and interpreted the data.

First, I begin by discussing my family and the experiences that informed their approach to education. I also reflect upon my own educational experiences in Korea before discussing my experience coming to and living in the United States. Next, I will discuss how my transnational experiences living in and moving between both Korea and the United States. I will then discuss how my participants' and my experiences intersect and how it impacted the study. To conclude, I will discuss my positionality as a researcher.

My Background and Experiences Relevant to the Study

Family and Education

In this section, utilizing the historical experiences of both my parents and myself, I discuss how highly education was regarded in my family. Specifically, I highlight my mother's narrative and my own experiences within the private schools.

Born to South Korean peasant families, my parents spent their childhood in poor rural villages in the post-Korean war reconstruction era of the 1950s and 1960s.

During this time, education was regarded as one of the best ways to get one's family out of poverty. As a result of this belief, my grandparents invested their limited financial resources towards my father's education. He became the first in his extended family to attend college. My mother, whose family was slightly better-off financially, was the second, next to one of her older brothers, to attend college.

The importance of education was always communicated in my family and college going messages were explicitly and directly expressed. My father felt deeply grateful and indebted to his parents, for instilling the importance of education in his mind. My father was especially grateful for my grandmother's efforts, as she took on various jobs including one as a street vendor to earn enough to send him to college. She endured physical hardship to support his educational goals and aspirations, all the while the family found difficulty putting food on the table. While my father was a high performing student, he suffered from financial difficulties. He often talked about how embarrassed he felt when his parents could not afford field trip fees in high school. He also often spoke about how diligently he worked to be the top student in his college because if his grades slipped, he would have been forced to leave school because he would lose his GPA-based scholarship.

My father always made sure that my brother and I did not need to worry about money. Our energies were to be spent on our school studies. While I feel overwhelming gratitude for my father's financial support, I also harbor mixed feelings. I realized much later in graduate school that I have taken his financial support for granted. He told me he took a great joy and pride whenever he wire-transferred money to my American bank account from his bank in Seoul. It was very

tempting for me to find refuge in the financial stability that my father wanted to provide for me. I broke out of the comfort zone that was my father's support and began to actively seek my own financial independence. Learning to be self-reliant and independent became more important than obtaining a degree or two.

In addition to my father's narrative around education, my mother's educational experiences also influenced me. My mother harbors bitterness about her involuntary decision to attend two-year teachers college. Her older brother persuaded my grandparents that a woman did not need to go an expensive four-year college. Rather, a two-year teachers' college was a far cheaper and far more suitable option. My mother had hoped to major in Physics in a four-year college, but she conceded due to her brother's and her parents' opposition. Subsequently, she attended a two-year teachers' college and majored in elementary education with a focus on Earth Science. After graduation and marriage to my father, my mother gave up her job as a rural elementary school teacher to move to Seoul and live with my father, who was working in the entertainment field. As a result of giving up her position, she also gave up any semblance of financial independence. Her frustration over leaving her job was exacerbated by her financial dependence on my father, which was worsened by his tight control over her financial activities.

My mother frequently told me that women too needed to have a job to become financially independent. As I grew up, her words influenced my own ideas about my future career and financial dealings. For me, getting married was not a marker of success. Being a successful individual instead was hallmarked by doing well in

school, becoming college educated, advancing to graduate school, finding a satisfying career and securing my own financial future.

Although both of my parents were committed to providing the best academic experiences they could afford, it was mostly my mother who actively supported me and my younger brother's schooling experiences. My father mostly provided financial support and approved of my mother's suggestions and decisions regarding our educational paths. She gathered and exchanged information on formal and informal education among a network of fellow mothers, who were all working diligently to secure the most desirable educational outcomes for their children. For example, along with a few other mothers in the neighborhood, she enrolled us in a private elementary school equipped with better resources than the local public elementary school, which was in walking distance from our house. In high school, my mother's major responsibility was to support me so that I could focus on studying for the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) or *suneung* that was used as a basis for college admission in Korea. She woke me up at six in the morning and prepared two boxed meals for me, one for lunch and the other for dinner. When I came home around midnight after additional after-school self-study sessions, she offered me fruits and snacks. On weekends, she drove me to *hagwon*, or cram school, in the mornings and brought me back home at night. Even amidst my crazy studying schedule, she found time to supplement my work with periods for recreation. My mother took me to public saunas, parks, and other places for the purpose of relaxation where both of us

enjoyed the fleeting moments of freedom from the grunt life of a *go sam*². She believed that having breaks were much more effective than sitting at a desk all the time. Throughout my elementary, middle, and high school educational experiences my mother and I were like a team. She was my friend, academic coach, manager, encourager, and caretaker.

My educational experiences and my family's support of my schooling were embedded in Korean educational and social contexts. College entrance was the most important objective of a majority of children and families. All the resources and efforts that my family put into my education in preK- 12 schooling were geared toward the purpose of getting me into a prestigious, highly competitive university. Many Korean families of means enrolled their children in private education outside of their formal education in schools to ensure their son or daughter was competitive in the application pools of colleges and universities. Attending *hagwon* and/or working alongside a tutor, or tutors, was prevalent among college-bound students, which was a reality for everyone in my high school. It was regarded as uncommon when students did not participate in any of those forms of private education. When this occurred it was thought that either s/he was brilliant and self-disciplined and did not need these supplemental learning opportunities or the family could not afford it.

As a recipient and beneficiary of an intense private education, I harbor mixed feelings about the role of private education. On the one hand, I particularly benefited from the English education that I received outside of school. The instructors at *hagwon* and my private tutors gave me individualized instruction so that I could

² *Go* means "high" from high school, and *sam* means number three from the third year in high school. Meaning 12th grade, *go sam* also represents the exclusive focus on preparing for college admission in the 12th grade by the student and the family.

maintain my reading, speaking, and listening skills that eventually became more advanced than most of my classmates. Having extra time to work on Math, English language, Composition, and Science, helped me relieve my anxiety over the competitiveness of my college applications. However, private education helped me to neither become a better learner nor a better thinker. I was not trained to be a self-directed learner because of my over-reliance on the tutors and instructors at *hagwons* to map out lessons for me. My frustrations with my own schooling experiences reflect not only my story, but the story of millions of Korean schoolchildren, who are continually subject to a rigorous and competition-driven educational climate. My story reflects just one account of the countless children toiling in the Korean education system. Both inside and outside of Korean schools, creativity and self-reliance were discouraged, while memorization and competition were emphasized.

To conclude, my parents were and continue to be strongly committed and dedicated to supporting my education. Unlike my mother's experience, my educational path was not limited because of my gender. My mother took charge of my schooling experiences. She made everyday decisions related to academic support, such as choosing between a private school and a public school for me, ensuring I went to get extra tutoring in *hagwon*, and seeing to my own relaxation and personal well-being. While all of these facets were important to my overall upbringing, private education strongly influenced my educational experiences in grade schools.

Working with Korean Mothers as a Teacher in Korea

My experiences as a high school teacher in 2008 also influenced the way I viewed mothers' involvement in my schooling and my subsequent interest in this

dissertation study. As a teacher, I came across some of my students' mothers, who seemed too-involved in their children's schooling experiences. To me, they seemed to try to "make" their daughters into something amazing, unique, or "better than" by managing their teenage lives and controlling their daughters' behaviors. A majority of my students went to one or more *hagwons* or had a private tutor. As a result of their grueling schedules, they did not really have the necessary time to work on their own, and digest and apply what they were taught. From my unique vantage, I was finally able to see the daily struggles of Korean students as they navigated through the rigorous educational climate. I realized that my students provided me a key glimpse into my own life history. I, too, was like them when I was a student.

Although I am critical of Korean mothers' reliance on private education, I empathize with their decision to utilize it. While it does create tremendous anxiety for children and families, it also provides a greater sense of security for the future livelihoods of their children. A mothers' role of supporting their children's education is very important in Korea. The success or failure of their children's education, mostly represented by their grades and eventual university acceptances, tends to indicate their success or failure as mothers to other family and community members. The pressure to secure high educational results for their children and the accompanying sense of responsibility to ensure their children gain the competitive edge are beginning to emerge among my friends in Korea who are parents of elementary school age children. While they do not want to put too much pressure on their children, they also want them to be successful academically. The stakes for their

child's success is quite high, because prestigious education and high-levels of academic credentials are important for social mobility in Korea.

Transnational Imagination of the United States as a “Better Place”

In this section, I discuss my own desire to come to the United States because I perceived it as an “imagined better place” (Rhee, 2006) in several ways. First, the U.S. products and popular culture that I had access to seemed to be more advanced than the Korean products to which I had access. Second, the system of U.S. higher education and the degrees that they conferred on individuals held far greater prestige in Korean society than Korean ones. Finally, the symbolic meaning of the United States was closely connected to the hyper-importance Koreans placed on English language.

Many South Koreans have an image about the United States as an “imagined better place” (Rhee, 2006). When I grew up, I thought of the United States as a nation where people spoke English and as place from where all the foreigners/westerners came. My image about the United States was shaped mainly by my father's best friend. He was a professor who received a doctoral degree from University of Michigan. Whenever we visited his house, I was in awe of Corelle dishes on which his wife presented her food and the way they ate rice and side dishes on plates, instead of in rice bowls and small Korean dishes we used at my house. They introduced me to Burger King, Pizza Hut, Disney movies - *The Little Mermaid* was the first - and other typical U.S. cultural items and products. In several ways, the United States felt like a place where cool and splendid things happened.

This image about the United States was maintained by my fascination with American popular culture in my adolescence. I was a big fan of popular musical acts like New Kids on the Block, Mariah Carey and Michael Bolton. I listened closely to the music, translated the lyrics from English into Korean language to best understand the meaning of these songs, and I attentively watched their music videos, mindful of their clothing styles and dances. I watched American Forces Korea Network (AFKN) for popular soap operas like Guiding Light and General Hospital, popular game shows like Wheel of Fortune, and I laughed at the hilarity of shows like America's Funniest Home Videos. Access to those American television shows and their accompanying imageries of typical clothing, home lives, products and other popular culture norms compelled me to view the United States as somehow a "better place" that I wanted to visit some time.

In addition to perceiving the superiority of American products and popular culture, many of my peers regarded U.S. education to be more prestigious and more desirable than Korean institutions. Particularly the South Korean fascination with U.S. higher education and prestige attached to American academic credentials felt pervasive when I was in college. Although all the professors in my French department earned their degrees from universities in France, a majority of the professors that I met in other areas had degrees conferred by universities in the United States. Among the countries that my friends attended for foreign language programs or exchange student programs, the United States was most sought after and felt most prestigious. It was in these contexts that my parents welcomed and supported my idea of going to the United States for graduate study. They took pride that my English language

competency and academic standing was good enough to both apply, and be admitted, to an American graduate program.

My decision to apply to a competitive U.S. graduate program was sparked by other factors, as well. I decided to apply to a graduate program in the United States because accompanying a Master's degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) would come privileges and benefits that would make me more competitive on the Korean job market. English proficiency was regarded as one of the most important skills that one could possess to be competitive as a student, a job-seeker, and as a white-collar employee in Korea. I have remained confident about my English proficiency in Korea, and with an American graduate degree, I thought I would be much more competitive in my teaching career.

In addition to the wealth of positive images were critiques that I had about the United States as a nation that had an imperialistic relationship with South Korea. At the time when I applied for graduate programs, my understanding about the U.S. military and political involvement in Korea was just beginning to form. The utility of the American graduate degree and the compelling popular images and products of the United States trumped my fledgling and emerging critical perspective.

To conclude, I had a perception of the United States as a "better place" based on the presence of American culture in Korea and the social prestige that an American degree had in Korean society. The importance of English language in Korea was another important factor that influenced my decision to pursue a graduate degree in the United States. These factors compelled me to move to the United States. I came with my eyes wide open to all that the US culture could offer me. In the next

section I explore in greater detail my educational and social experiences within the United States.

Experiences in the United States

In this section, I discuss my experiences living and learning in the United States and Korea. Specifically, I discuss how I became conscious of my racial, ethnic, immigrant, and social class identities due to my experiences in graduate programs. Then, I discuss how I became interested in Korean mothers' parental experiences as a research topic.

In the United States, I became aware of and very cognizant of the concepts of race, ethnicity, and immigration status. I grappled with my new identity as a foreigner, graduate student, and a speaker of a language other than the official language of the country that I lived in. I slowly began to understand my identity, and others' identification of me, as a person of Asian descent. In the United States, race held a particular importance and significance that was new to me. For example, the boxes that I had to choose for racial category in the application forms for graduate programs seemed arbitrary and complicated. The transformation that I experienced was quite close to what Rhee (2006) described about her experiences navigating the United States landscape:

Through my migration to the U.S., the abrupt interpellation of myself in my 20s into hyper-racialized U.S. social relations which both publicly and intimately insisted that I am colored, I was made to become a person of color. People of color are made, not born. (Rhee, 2006, p. 31)

Similar to Rhee's experience, I became a "person of color" in the United States. My simplistic understanding of race formed during my upbringing in Korea became more sophisticated as I read, studied, and engaged with others in and outside of my graduate classes. In particular, my doctoral coursework and readings influenced my learning and helped me to conceptualize and verbalize the issues related to diversity, particularly on race, social class, and immigration status.

Due to the lack of first-hand experiences with racial marginalization and with limited understandings of the history of racial battles in U.S educational contexts, I struggled to understand and comprehend many of the readings and discussions in class. The level of language proficiency required to engage fully in graduate level courses made my struggle to understand complex historical and sociological concepts more challenging. Finding my reading challenging posed a dilemma in and of itself, as I always identified myself as a highly proficient and advanced English learner in Korea. Another significant hurdle was that I could not relate personally to the readings. One day, I read a chapter on Asians Americans in the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (Banks & Banks, 2004). It was a surprisingly engaging and interesting experience for me. The level of engagement and connection I experienced as a reader was starkly different from many other readings where people of Asian descent were absent.

I recognized the absence of Asian Americans in much of the discourse of U.S. schooling and I also began to understand the marginalization of Asian Americans in many of the academic and professional settings that I experienced. I noted that when Asian Americans were actually mentioned in academic and professional settings, they

were typically characterized on the well-performing side of the achievement gap graph that continually presented Blacks and Latinos as the under-performing groups. I also began to understand that people of Asian descent in the United States were not always included in the history and the discussion of racism, discrimination, social justice, inequality, and diversity in the field of education. This invisibility and marginalization of Asian Americans, and the overgeneralization and stereotyping of people of Asian descent is still prevalent in educational literature. I developed a sense of academic responsibility to disseminate knowledge about the racial and ethnic group to which I belonged and represent them in a more accurate way.

Probably because I was made hyper-conscious about my minoritized status in terms of race, ethnicity, immigration status, and language proficiency, my reflection on my social class background came much later. In graduate course discussions that involved reflecting on one's own experiences, my early childhood experiences were very different from those of my fellow graduate students who were from working class or low-income backgrounds. Also, as I read more about Korean and Korean American education, it became clearer that social class was a critical factor in shaping their experiences. I realized that I was privileged in that my parents possessed the educational capital and the financial resources to invest in my education.

As I read more about the Korean population living in the United States and interacted with different Korean sub-communities, the differentiations that existed among groups and individuals became clearer. Depending on the immigration status, generation, socioeconomic background, locational context, and other contextual factors, Korean experiences in the United States diverged. Due to the cultural and

linguistic affinity I felt, it was quite natural for me to form a network mostly comprised of first generation Korean adults and fellow international students. I wanted to know more about their experiences as immigrants who lived in both countries as an adult, who felt more familiar with speaking Korean, and who had parents, family, friends or other “roots” in Korea, like me.

As I pondered about issues in Korean American education, I focused on a particular subgroup of Korean parents in the United States. As a daughter and a woman who hopes to be a mother in the future, I wanted to listen to mothers’ stories. I grew up with many adults around me in my extended family, and I spent a significant amount of time with females as I helped them cook and prepare for family events. I enjoyed listening to their stories. I regularly met Korean immigrant women with children in personal and profession settings. I was interested in how they navigated the American education environment when they were neither fully fluent in English nor had experiences going to school in the United States, like me.

During my graduate work, I became conscious and cognizant about race, class, ethnicity, immigrant status, and language proficiency as factors that influence human experiences. My personal and professional association with first generation Korean immigrant mothers also led me to have interest in their experiences as parents.

Transnational Experiences in the United States and in Korea

I am living a transnational life. Geographical, temporal, and cultural borders seem to blur in my every day experiences. In this section, I discuss how my life in the United States and Korea is transnational in terms of interacting with people in both

countries in virtual space, consuming media products in both countries, and physically traveling between the two countries.

I talk to my family and friends in Korea via social networking services as a daily activity and I video-chat with my parents regularly. On virtual spaces such as Facebook and Twitter, I associate with as many people in Korea as in the United States. I follow news and developments in Korea by reading articles on the internet and visiting links that are shared by my friends in Korea. I seek assistance from Korean friends with my daily life dilemmas and share everyday normal occurrences. All of these transnational interactions make me forget we are actually thousands of miles away from each other.

In the early stage of my stay in the United States, I watched American news and television shows more than Korean ones. However, as the high speed internet environment became increasingly convenient and affordable, watching Korean TV shows and news on the internet became a part of my routine. As I engaged more with Korean media, I found that linguistic and cultural affinity to the content and the sense of connection that I felt were much higher than when I connected with American media. Compared to American programs, Korean programs were easier to understand and made more sense to me. After several years of almost exclusive consumption of Korean media, now I am more balanced in watching contents from Korea, the United States, and other countries. I still consume cultural products such as television shows, news, and music made in Korea with ease via internet sites and online stores. It is as if I am living in two worlds simultaneously.

In addition to enjoying Korean media, I regularly visited Korea throughout my graduate studies. Spending time with family and friends in Korea was like a weekend retreat from a hectic everyday life and it gave me strength to go on. Above all, just being in an environment where I could communicate with people in my mother tongue and knowing what to do in most of settings I encountered felt comfortable. Entering the customs and entry point at Incheon Airport, I did not have to worry about my immigration paperwork because I was a legal citizen of Republic of Korea. It was such a liberating experience not having to feel like a potential criminal, which I still often experience entering the United States when Immigration and Customs officer ask me questions about my purpose of the visit, plans after graduation, the amount of money I carry, and other personal topics. However, these occurrences by no means compelled me to quit my graduate program and stay in Korea. After spending about a month in South Korea on each visit, I was refreshed and ready to return to my graduate student life in the United States. In this sense, visiting Korea was a crucial part of a support structure that helped me live a successful life in the United States.

My everyday experiences are embedded in transnational contexts. Interacting with people and consuming the media and cultural products in Korea minimize the sense of physical and territorial boundaries between two countries. In addition, visiting Korea helped me lead my life in the United States by providing me a support network and system. Spending time in Korea gave me time to immerse myself back into the traditions, customs, and ways to which I was most familiar and return to life in the United States anew.

Intersections of Backgrounds and Experiences

In this section, I discuss how my experiences intersect with my participants' and how these overlaps impacted the study. There were commonalities between the experiences of the mothers in my study and my own. The four mothers in my study were four to twelve years older to me. We grew up in different time periods and different places in Korea, but we also shared several aspects. All the mothers had at least some level of graduate study and except for one mother, who came after she graduated from high school, we came to the United States after graduating from college. We came from middle-class and higher income backgrounds. The classroom environments and national curriculum that we experienced in Korea were similar. For the past ten or more years, our main residences were in the United States, so we understood contemporary political, social, and cultural issues in the United States. These commonalities helped me relate to many aspects of their educational experiences in Korea and in the United States and understand the contexts in which their experiences were embedded.

While there were numerous similarities between our shared experiences, there were also key divergences. The mothers have lived in the United States for fourteen to nineteen years, longer than the ten years of my stay. Mrs. K and Mrs. S started with F-1 student visas like me, but all four mothers have lived in the United States as non-students for a significant part of their stay. Our visa status is a difference in our lives because experiences of students are often confined to campus settings. At the time of the study, I was a single young adult living in a shared housing situation. They were all married and had children and although some worked, their central role was being a

mother. This is a significant difference to note. Whether or not one is a parent impacts how one views the world, as Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) noted in her experience studying the dynamics between parents and teachers.

Overall, my personal background influenced the way I approached and engaged in the research. First, I had mixed feelings about Korean parents' involvement in children's education. On one hand, I valued their efforts as much as I am appreciative of my own parents' support for my educational path. I also have a critical view toward private education and intensive parent involvement among Korean parents which I think might hinder children's development by preventing them from developing as self-reliant and independent individuals and as self-directed learners. This view might have influenced the way I perceived the participants' involvement efforts and engagement in private education.

Second, my experiences of studying in both Korean and American settings help me understand the complexities of living and learning between two countries and the cultures and educational contexts in both countries from a personal perspective. However, since I am not a mother who raises children, my experiences can also limit the extent to which I capture, analyze, and interpret the data specific to parenting. Finally, my daily experiences in transnational contexts allow me to see transnationalism in relation to my participants' experiences in a closer and more intimate way. At the same time, however, the intimate and strong meanings attached to transnational engagement in my daily experiences might have possibly obscured the lower level of importance and meanings of those activities in my participants' experiences.

I am upfront about the possibility that my experiences might have influenced my collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data. Throughout the research process, I constantly tried to remain aware and conscious of the impact of my background. I tried to stay away from projecting myself to the participants and understanding their experiences as if they were mine.

Positionality

As a researcher and a participant observer, I positioned myself as a person who tried to learn about mothers' experiences as parents in the United States. I explore my willingness to learn from this research experience and change my ideas and beliefs based on what I learned from my participants' lived experiences. I considered myself and the participants as co-creators of the experiences and the knowledge detailed in the study.

I specifically communicated this attitude to the participants as well. I showed my interest in hearing how they grew up (especially what their relationships with their parents were like), and learning more about what kind of students they themselves were back in Korea. I also was interested in hearing about what made them to come to the United States and how they adapted themselves to the new environment while carrying out their role as a mother. Lastly, I was interested in hearing about how their roles as mothers played into their own and their children's hopes and plans. I invited them to talk about topics of interest to them, instead of insisting on posing only the questions that I devised.

I regarded the interview as an activity that the participants and I were both engaged in to create meaning. In this regard, I could be viewed as a co-participant. As

a co-participant, I actively shared my experiences from Korea and the United States when I felt they were relevant. I expressed my feelings and ideas in response to what the participants said. I acknowledge that I had assumptions about the mothers but also was willing to reshape my perceptions about them. Since I expected and anticipated having updated understanding about their lives through the research process, I was open to the changes of ideas that I would experience as a result of the conversations and data analysis. I respected the participants' voice and perspectives, and I was willing to and expected to change my knowledge and perceptions through the research process.

Conclusion

Understanding the present cannot be complete without understanding the past and looking ahead of the future. In this chapter, I documented my background and past and present experiences and discussed how these could influence the study. I shared my own educational experiences, my deep fascination with U.S. culture, and the difficulty I had grappling with my identity once I arrived to the United States for graduate study. I also discussed how my own lived experiences shaped my perceptions and biases about my participants' lives and the choices they made to educate their children. As indicated in this chapter, I was very close to this study in many ways. The exploration of Korean immigrant mothers' experiences was like an exploration of my own life in the past and in the present, and looking ahead toward my own possible future as a mother. In the following chapter, I introduce the participants and highlight some of the themes that I have found regarding their beliefs, perceptions and behaviors as mothers.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter reports on the findings from analyzed data focusing on the mothers' perceptions, beliefs, and ideas about their role in supporting their children's education. To situate the stories in a context, I start each case by briefly describing the setting where the interviews and observation were conducted. Then, I introduce each mother's background and discuss themes that emerged. Particularly salient for all of the mothers were their ideals and self-perception about mothering, comparisons with peers, family support, different perceptions of Korea, and perceived minority status.

Mrs. J

Access to the Site

I met Mrs. J at weekly Buddhist meetings for about three months prior to inviting her to participate in the study. She identified as Catholic; however, she attended meetings to learn more about Buddhist teachings. As we talked informally at the meetings, I learned that she had experiences being a parent in more than one county. I was interested in hearing more about her involvement in different settings, and I asked if she would be willing to participate in the study. She hesitated at first. She seemed concerned about opening up her house. After I described the study in more detail, she agreed to participate.

I first visited Mrs. J's house in June 2013. The neighborhood consisted of large, single-family homes, surrounded by big trees. In the front yard of her house was a big tree with a swing made from a car tire. As I walked to the house, May, one

of Mrs. J's daughters, greeted me with a Korean tummy-bow³ outside the front door. Mrs. J and her children were having lunch in the dining area, and I joined them. During our lunch together, there was much talking between the mother and her children. Mrs. J mostly used Korean language for casual and informal interactions and spoke English when she explained things to the children. The children always responded in English. After cleaning up the table, Mrs. J told the children that she and I would have a "serious talk" for about an hour. We went downstairs to a room with children's desks, sofa, books, games, and toys. She and I each sat on desk chairs and started the conversation. During the interview, she did not hesitate to share her thoughts, opinions, and feelings. She was engaged in our discussion and responded to all of my questions in full detail.

Introduction

Mrs. J identified herself as a full-time mom. She lived with her husband, a government employee, and her children in Washington County. In her mid-40s, she was a lean, small-figured woman with mid-length hair that was mostly tied up in the back. She wore glasses, which made her appear astute. Mrs. J was self-reflective and approachable. She seemed to have spent time reflecting on her life, her choices, and how her personal life experiences played out in how she chose to raise her children. When speaking, she articulated her thoughts clearly and with passion. Mrs. J easily showed her emotions by often bursting into laughter when sharing funny anecdotes or welling up with tears when describing emotional experiences.

³ Mrs. J's children used this Korean-style greeting when greeting Korean adults as a way of being polite and courteous. As we became closer, we greeted each other by waving hands in a more American way.

Mrs. J was born in a provincial city in Korea, where she was the third among four siblings. Mrs. J said she felt her older siblings and her mother offered unsolicited advice and were far too involved in her life when she grew up. Her older siblings gave her too much advice, and her mother was forceful and controlling of her life. Her mother had plans for her future and tried to steer her into becoming an accomplished musician. When Mrs. J decided to quit her lessons, Mrs. J's mother decided her daughter should major in a foreign language. Mrs. J felt that up until high school, her mother constantly pushed her. As a result, she grew accustomed to following her mother's instructions without questioning. However, when Mrs. J entered college and was provided some freedom, she rebelled and did almost everything she wanted to do, even if her choices ran contrary to her mother's will. Due in large part to the unsettled and sometimes complex relationship with her mother, Mrs. J had difficulty overcoming her mother's death from a stroke several years later. Mrs. J noted that she felt "as if the world collapsed." Mrs. J's life course was changed after her mother's death; because she wanted to help people in need, she felt inspired to study special education in graduate school.

Mrs. J's migration to the United States was neither planned nor imagined, but rather it happened from a casual, light-hearted action. In 1997, Mrs. J was enrolled in a doctoral program in Special Education in a Korean University, and she visited her older sister who was a graduate student in the United States. During her visit, she applied for a bilingual special education teacher position. She was eventually offered the position, took a leave from her graduate program, and moved to the United States with the encouragement of a Korean professor who felt it would be a good experience

to work in an American school. She did not expect it would lead into an extended stay. After meeting and eventually marrying her Korean American husband, she quit her job as a teacher and became a housewife when they moved to another state for his study. As a new mother, Mrs. J struggled without the support of family members or friends to help with childrearing duties. Her challenges increased when she found her four year old daughter Amy had a progressive hearing impairment. Amy's condition greatly impacted her parenting experience thereafter.

Mrs. J's family moved to another state for her spouse's job, and eight years later they moved again to Washington County specifically for their children's educational purposes. The county has a specialized school that served children with similar educational needs to Amy's, and it had other quality traditional public school options that were suitable for Amy's other siblings. In addition to the schools, Mrs. J was drawn to their new location based on the resources available in the community. Mrs. J noted that Washington County offered easier access to private education services such as tutors and *hagwon*, as well as a close network of Korean immigrant mothers who readily shared education-related information. At the time of the study, Amy was attending a neighborhood school, whereas her siblings were in gifted and talented programs in a nearby magnet school. Mrs. J said she did not want to move back to her previous location in another county because the academic rigor and overall quality of education in its schools were significantly lower than her children's current schools. As a result, Mrs. J's husband commuted long hours each day to his work. Both her husband and Mrs. J were adamant that they could not compromise the educational benefits that they enjoyed in the current county. Mrs. J and her husband

were both deeply committed to providing their children with the best educational opportunities possible.

Mrs. J and her children visited Korea regularly. When she was not visiting her family in Korea, she talked with them on the phone regularly. Particularly, she maintained a close relationship with her younger brother and considered him her life mentor, discussing concerns with him and asking for advice.

In the next sections, I highlight some of the findings from the interview and observation data. I first introduce Mrs. J's conceptualization of "the best mother," herself, and her mother, which were central to her beliefs and perceptions. Then, I describe a gap existing between the mother she aspired to be and her own self-perception. I also discuss how she worked to mend the gap between these two types of self. Next, I described how she thought of Korea as a better place from a mother's perspective. Her home country was also a place she could rest and return to the United States renewed.

Beliefs about a Mother's Role: "The Best Mother"

Mrs. J described her ideas about what she believed was the concept of "the best mother" and then explained why she did not think she reflected this high ideal. According to Mrs. J, an ideal mother was one who knew little (e.g., about academics or about the world), warm-heartedly embraced and accepted her children, and encouraged them unconditionally. Concerning her definition of "the best mom," she noted that this is "[a] mother who cooks delicious foods and just says 'yes, yes, you did a good job' to her children no matter what they do, and who is warm and comfortable. That's the best mom, I think." (July 29, 2013: 598).

Mrs. J's image of an ideal mother was created in reaction to her relationship with her late mother. She described her mother as a very bright woman, who memorized all the phone numbers of her contacts. She also remembered her mother as being a strict woman who held very high expectations of her children, particularly on academics. Mrs. J said, "I always felt that I was not good enough. I was a daughter who fell short of her expectations" (July 29, 2013: 471). Although Mrs. J felt she was unable to meet her mother's expectations, her older siblings "excelled academically in school" (July 29, 2013: 490), which made her feel even more inferior.

Mrs. J said her mother wanted to "make [her]" (July 29, 2013: 490) into a musician because a fortuneteller told her mother that Mrs. J would be successful in the arts. She followed her mom's wish and studied music diligently, but eventually abandoned music in high school, because she felt it was not good for her socially. She said: "I could not stand being alone with the piano" and "would rather be in an orchestra" (July 29, 2013: 517). Mrs. J vividly remembered her mother's strong reaction to her decision:

She gave up [the idea of making me a musician]. I quit playing [the instrument] in high school. When I told her that I was going to quit... I still remember her face, her face at that moment. Her, sitting down in deep distress. It was like what she had built until that moment vanished at once, bursting like a bubble. Korean parents are like that. She was in the middle of doing something at that time, I don't remember exactly what it was, but her face turned completely in anguish. If parents could accept things like that

light-heartedly, children could live their lives light-heartedly. But it was everything for my mom. (July 29, 2013; 494, 496)

Mrs. J described how her mother's expectations burdened her, as well as how difficult it was when she was not able to meet her mother's high expectations. After Mrs. J quit music, her mom told her to major in a foreign language despite her wish to major in a different field of study. She eventually followed her mother's wishes. She said: "when parents make every decision for you as you grow up, then you don't have ability to judge" (July 29, 2013; 509). Although she stated that she rebelled by "doing everything she wanted" (July 29, 2013; 545) in college, her overall perception about her mother was that she interfered in her life too much. As an adult she tried to escape from her mother's grasp and be free from her influences.

A Gap between the Ideals and Self-perception

Mrs. J's aspiration was to be a carefree mother who exhibited minimal influence over her children; however, her self-perception was a mother who had a tendency to be overly involved in their lives. Accordingly, she constantly tried to monitor and change herself.

High expectations were recurring themes in the story about Mrs. J and her mother's tenuous relationship. She mirrored the high expectations for herself and her future children. When she was pregnant with Amy, she thought, "The baby will be a perfect one" (July 29, 2013: 607). She went to Catholic mass every day and prayed to bring a healthy child into the world. She refrained from eating any food that was deemed unhealthy to ensure that she would have the perfect child of her dreams.

After Amy was born, and she found out about her disability, she found it unacceptable:

Then my struggle began. Amy did not understand me. Communication [with her] was hard. [Her language development] was delayed compared to other children. I couldn't really overcome [my frustration that came from] her falling short of my expectations; I thought my child would be a perfect one. Also, since I was a special ed teacher, I thought I would be a great teacher for her. However, she was not following at all. I felt every emotion you could feel as a mother while raising her. (July 29, 2013: 609)

While Mrs. J admitted that she felt constrained and limited by her own mother's excessive involvement in her life, she found herself mirroring her mother's behavior. She had a tendency to push her children in a direction that she wanted. When Mrs. J realized what she was doing, she said she consciously tried to refrain from involving herself too much in her children's lives, because it was not good for them:

I would actually go ahead and say to them with excitement, 'Hey, why don't you search Civil War on the Internet?' Children lose [their interest] if their mom is more excited about something than they are, right? So [I try to] let my children go ahead of me. I need to live my own life. I try to do that these days. And, I should keep my words short and brief, like from five times to one time, even if they are [compliments]. But it's hard. Maybe because it's in my blood. Anyhow, the biggest thing I always tell myself is 'Step back, step back.' (July 29, 2013: 541)

She also said she did not “let [her] children learn from making mistakes” (July 29, 2013: 799), fearing that the consequences resulting from their own behaviors may harm them. She worried she was not a perfect role model for her children. As a result, she said she tried to minimize her influence on her children. She said she tried to have her children experience other families as much as possible and sent them to visit their friends’ homes whenever possible.

Mrs. J’s emphasis on “stepping back” seemed to contradict her active involvement in her children’s education. She was deeply committed to providing a good education for the children. She supported her children’s extracurricular activities by hiring musical instructors for lessons at home and volunteered in two of her children’s school regularly. Mrs. J moved her family to their current neighborhood from the previous state, because the county had a school that supported children with hearing impairments, as well as other quality public schools existed nearby that were suitable for her other children.

“Stepping back” for Mrs. J. did not mean that she thought she would not be supportive. Rather, “stepping back” meant she did not want her children to feel they were constrained or limited by her words. She expressed this concern while discussing what occupation she wanted her children to have:

People say kids feel [parents’ intention], even if parents don’t say out loud. [...] For example, I must sound differently to the kids when I say ‘Would you like to eat something?’ from when I say ‘I want you to be an engineer.’ They immediately feel how much importance I put in each sentence. So I really hope I don’t do that.” (July 29, 2013: 566-567)

In my opinion, Mrs. J's self-perception and perceived influence on her children seemed a little exaggerated. During my observations and informal interactions, she did not appear to be too forceful or aggressive. She almost always asked the children to say what they wanted and listened to them when they were speaking. She might have been too sensitive while interacting with her children and overly concerned that she was being intrusive in their lives.

Mrs. J was self-critical and there appeared to be a gap between her own self-perception and how others viewed her interactions with her children. She said that she did not fit the image of an ideal mother because she "knew too much." Mrs. J noted, "I would tell people that my kids are unfortunate because their mom knows too much" (July 29, 2013: 598). Perhaps her insecurity about her role as a mother was informed by the high expectations she maintained for herself as a mother. Despite all the efforts she made, she seemed to undervalue her accomplishments of focusing on what she couldn't accomplish rather than celebrating and appreciating what she could achieve. Although she acknowledged that her assistance helped Amy reach her current level of academic and language development, she still regretted that she did not balance Amy's academic development with her social skills development. In addition to her perceptions about ideals and self-perception related to mothers, her description of Korea was also salient in her experiences as a mother, which I describe in more detail in the next section.

Meaning of Korea

“I wanted to go back to Korea”: A Better Place for a Mother

Mrs. J stated that unlike many other immigrant adults, she did not have a strong desire to immigrate to and settle in the United States. When she married her Korean American husband, she had only vague notions about living in the United States for the rest of her life. Particularly during the first several years after becoming a mother, she wished to return to Korea, because she would have more familial resources. She particularly missed the social support that family members could provide as she raised her children. She missed support from her friends from whom she could easily request information regarding extracurricular activities and services for her children, such as the best tennis coach or the most appropriate *hagwon*. Here, she had to do all the legwork to search for information.

Mrs. J said she constantly compared her life in the United States to what it would have been like in Korea. Once she shared a simple yet poignant statement that represented her overall sentiment of being an immigrant mother in the United States compared to being a mother in Korea. She noted, “I don’t advise (Korean) people to come [to the United States]” (July 29, 2013: 064). This simple, yet remarkably powerful reflection was loaded with the frustrations and anxieties she felt as she struggled to successfully raise her children in her relatively new context.

Although she felt that it would be easier to be a mother in Korea, she shared several reasons underlying her rationale for not returning to Korea. Her reasons centered on the lives of her children and her husband. Most of all, Amy had much better support in the United States than in Korea for her disability. In addition, her

children would be subjected to much more stress related to competition and academic pressure if they were to move to Korea. She said, “I know living here is good for my kids. [It’s because] it’s okay for them to study less in the United States [than in Korea]. That’s the only reason for me [to stay here]” (July 29, 2013: 88). Although she used the word “only” in this statement, she also considered her husband’s preference. Her husband was comfortable in an American setting and preferred to spend time with his family and maintain a more individual lifestyle than he would in Korea. Mrs. J explained, “You only need to mind your own business here” (July 29, 2013: 55), as opposed to having to follow what was decided as a group in Korean workplace. In addition, his current job as a federal employee granted the family a decent quality of life, and Mrs. J admitted she did not want to give up benefits such as health care. She also said that although she could enroll her children in schools in Korea if they wanted, she would not actually choose to do so, because she did not want the family to be separated.

Mrs. J’s comments about living in the United States surprised me. I assumed that Korean immigrant mothers would prefer living in the United States. I did not expect that Mrs. J, who seemed to be actively involved in her children’s education, to be skeptical about being a mother in the United States. This gap between my assumptions and Mrs. J’s comments seems to stem from not differentiating the mother’s vantage compared to the children’s vantage. Her comparison between the two contexts was more from a mother’s position than from her children’s or her husband’s. She placed more importance on the benefits of raising her children in the United States and on the success and stability of her husband’s career than on her

own interests; as a result, she has accepted living in the United States. She seemed to be determined to make the best of her life in the United States, because she did not see any possibility of moving to Korea for now.

Korea as a Refuge: A Space for Healing and Transformation

Mrs. J had a chance to stay in Korea for six months after her father passed away several years ago. She described this transformative period of as time that “healed” her. At the time she returned to Korea, she had worked with Amy at home every day for several years. As she recalled the experience of helping Amy develop language ability, tears welled up in her eyes, and her voice trembled slightly. Her sad face and sighs illustrated the deep level of struggle and stress she experienced. She worked with Amy every day until nine in the evening teaching vocabulary and short stories. She recalled that teaching abstract words such as “poor” was especially challenging.

During her stay in Korea, she stayed with her younger brother’s family. As her mentor and as a person she consulted for any difficulties, her brother introduced her to meditation. She explained that through meditation she healed herself and had an opportunity to engage in self-reflection. She shared that she went through a transformation during that time:

I didn’t know why my life was going in to that direction [of suffering]. I didn’t know what I was pursuing that actually made my life flow into a certain direction. [...] I still did not change completely, but I kind of sensed what was going wrong. I kept pushing Amy to make her like a normal child. That’s actually how she got where she is now. Without it, she couldn’t be where she

is now. However, if I advise other mothers [in the same situation], I will not recommend that. I used to think that I was supposed to [focus on academics] several years ago. [...] If I did it over again, I would develop other abilities as well as academic abilities. My biggest regret is that Amy did not spend more time playing with other kids. [...] Amy took about six hours to understand what other kids would take ten minutes. [If she spent more time playing with kids,] she would be behind in her reading proficiency by about a year, but I'm afraid that might have been better [than her reading on grade level]. (July 29, 2012: 613)

Mrs. J had an opportunity to reflect on her approaches to her children's education and realized she was actually pushing Amy too hard in a direction that focused only on academics while undermining social and emotional skills. She realized Amy should have balance between the two aspects of development and regretted that she did not put as much importance on social and emotional aspect as academics. As she continued to describe her experiences in Korea, including her interaction with her brother, it was clear that she saw her home country as a place for healing and transformation. Probably thanks to the healing and transformation in her perspectives, she seemed to feel much more reflective, peaceful, and accepting about her ability to support her daughter. She recognized that working with Amy and her other children helped her become mature.

Summary

Mrs. J decided she needed to step back, because she was not a good role model for her children. Her idea of exerting the least amount of influence on children

was closely related to her beliefs about what an ideal mother was supposed to do and what kind of person she should be. Her beliefs were shaped by her reactions to her upbringing experiences in South Korea and critical self-reflection on her own practice in the United States. She and her husband were strongly committed to providing better educational services and opportunities for their children. However, she seemed to focus less on their strengths and accomplishments and more on what could have been done or what needed to be done to improve their academic and social capabilities. Overall, she perceived that living in the United States did not provide her with the childrearing support and resources that she might have received in Korea. However, she was trying to make the best of her life in the United States, because she saw how living here increased the benefit for her children and her husband.

Mrs. Y

Access to the Site

I first met Mrs. Y in the spring of 2006. She was a colleague at a small, non-profit organization that served Korean American children and families in the local area. She was a lively, smiling, bubbly woman in her early 30s and pregnant with her first son. We saw each other occasionally in the office, because we worked on different programs. As a newcomer to the area, I asked her about the local Korean community, and she shared her experiences of having lived in the area for about 10 years. We stayed in communication with each other after both of us were no longer involved with the organization. When she learned about my dissertation study, she showed interest in becoming a participant. I welcomed her participation, because I

had already established a rapport with her. Her son's schooling experiences sounded like an interesting source for more investigation.

It was a hot summer day when I first visited Mrs. Y's house in 2013. There was a soccer net in the front yard. Mrs. Y greeted me at the door. Her parents were sitting at a dining table, and we greeted one another. She pointed to a newspaper published by a local Korean media outlet on the dining table. In the picture was a group of Korean community leaders including her, who had been invited to the White House. She said she showed pictures like this to her children to boost their self-confidence, because the pictures indicated that their mother was an important person with social recognition. In the living room area were bookshelves filled with books, computers, DVDs, a television, and toys. On the wall were educational posters with Korean letters and vocabulary. There was a parrot in a cage on the balcony. I talked with Mrs. Y's son Min, who was in first grade, about the game he was playing on an iPad. After Mrs. Y asked him to go upstairs and spend time with his aunt, she sat on a picnic chair, and I sat on the sofa to proceed with the interview. The conversation was conducted in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

Introduction

Mrs. Y lived with her husband, two children, her parents, sister, and sister's husband in Washington County, close to Mrs. J and Mrs. S's neighborhoods. She was a government employee and her husband worked in finance. In her 30s, she was healthy looking and wore her hair in a short bob haircut. When she spoke, she did so logically and used a decisive tone. She often burst into laughter when she talked.

She came to the United States to attend college in 1994. According to Mrs. Y and her mother, she was a unique, strong-headed girl. She was a tomboy who had to have her way. As a young girl, she had a strong sense of righteousness and, according to her mother, did not stand for anything she considered to be unjust.

Mrs. Y had a dream of attending school in the United States from the time she was in fourth grade. According to her mother, she was adamant and unyielding about the idea. Mrs. Y explained she wanted to escape from the patriarchy that seemed to be the cause of much of her mother's suffering, and she wanted to become a successful woman in the United States, where gender equality was more prevalent than in Korea. One of her inspirations was an autobiographical essay written by a Korean Harvard graduate on his experience attending a private boarding school and graduating Magna Cum Laude from Harvard University. The book *Seven Acts, Seven Scenes* was one of the most-read books among Korean students, including me, in mid-1990s. Her father did not approve of the idea of studying in the United States, but her mother fought for it. Her mother relentlessly saved money and later sent it for Mrs. Y's tuition and living expenses when she was finally able to accomplish her dream and study in the United States.

When she came to the United States, Mrs. Y had a challenging time adjusting to the new environment. She was introduced to various thoughts and philosophies that she could use to explain her cultural experience as an international student. Her next plan was to become a nurse and obtain permanent residency granted to those with professional occupations. However, the field training in her nursing program was

very different from what she expected. She instead changed her path and embarked on her career in public health.

Mrs. Y felt that her academic experiences and career planning would have been much easier if she had received good mentoring. Hoping to provide what she felt was lacking in her own educational experiences to later generations, she opened a *hagwon*, in addition to working her day job. She hoped that her *hagwon* would be one that developed and fostered a variety of competencies and abilities beyond academic enrichment and test-taking. She provided opportunities for volunteering, field trips, and other activities that she felt were lacking in many Korean immigrant families' experiences.

After several years, she closed her *hagwon* to spend more time with her son who was experiencing behavioral challenges in school. His school sent notes to her, and she was called to the principal's office because of his behavioral issues. She believed his behavioral difficulties were partly due to differences between the American school culture and the Korean culture practiced at their home. After a time, she perceived that her relationship with him improved, and her son's behavior in school improved. She seemed to be satisfied with the changes in her life.

In the following sections, I introduce Mrs. Y's beliefs about a mother's role and the transitions and conflicts that she experienced as she juggled multiple roles in addition to her role as a mother. Then, I describe how her beliefs and perceptions about education and her maternal role were embedded in her familial context.

Beliefs about a Mother's Role

Mrs. Y believed that a mother should provide what a child needs, build on his/her strengths, and strengthen his/her weaknesses. Describing herself as “a helicopter mom,” she acknowledged that she was involved heavily in her son’s education. She seemed to be confident that she knew her child and what was good for him.

An Advocate

Mrs. Y believed that she needed to be an advocate for her son Min. She arrived at this conclusion after a series of incidents where she was called to his school for his behavioral issues and after his teacher raised the possibility that he might have ADHD. She felt strongly that her knowledge of her son and Korean culture helped her make informed educational decisions regarding her son. She said:

If I didn’t know about my child, Korean culture, American culture, and school culture, and if I didn’t position myself as an advocate of my child, then [my child] would be treated like a fool. I would have probably said ‘I’m sorry’ and had him take medicine, or I would have said ‘OK, I will talk to my doctor.’ Or, if I didn’t like [giving him medicine], I would have said ‘I don’t wanna give him medication. Just go with it.’ Or I might have said ‘I don’t want special education’ and made decisions on an emotional ground, probably?

(August 2, 2013: 347)

Mrs. Y compared her style with other mothers who may not necessarily have a strong understanding of cultures and the language proficiency that she has. She was also critical of the teacher’s idea that Min might have ADHD. She had Min tested by a neurologist in order to minimize the cultural influences of a psychologist, which

could impact the diagnosis. The result was negative. With her background in nursing and psychology, she was able to approach her son's behavior issues with at least a partially informed understanding. She also possessed sufficient English proficiency that allowed her to communicate with school administrators and teachers.

“Fortress Builder” and “Facilitator”

Mrs. Y believed that she needed to be a “facilitator” (August 2, 2013: 708) for Min when he was with non-family members. She knew her son's social and language skills were weak; as such, he needed her assistance. When she thought that Min could be misunderstood due to his way of speaking, she explained what he meant to other people. Mrs. Y explained that Min was more proficient in Korean and still developing his English proficiency. Unintentionally, he could sound too direct or rude when he spoke English. She referred to this as “building a fortress” around Min:

If I'm in the same space with him like in a swimming pool, and [Min] says something incorrect unintentionally, I can correct it saying ‘Oh, this is what he means’ to people. I can explain it to other mothers. I build a fortress a little higher for him. I say ‘He speaks Korean at home, so that is why [he talked the way he did]’ and correct him. In a context where this can be done, like in swimming pools, Min always makes friends and plays with them. (August 2, 2013: 673)

Mrs. Y, in this regard, acted as a go-between or rather as a protector or guard of her son's growth and sense of self. She also described her role of being a “facilitator” (August 2, 2013: 708) when there were any issues between Min and other children. For example, at home, she told her son he was a scientist as a way to encourage and

affirm his scientific curiosity. In one case, when Min's friends did not approve of his identification with a scientist, she stepped in and facilitated the situation:

When kids are left by themselves, they work things out by themselves.

Normal kids can do it. Young [Min's sister] can do it, because she has social skills. Min's social skills are weaker, so it's difficult for him [to deal with the situation]. You need to do some 'negotiation,' or provide some support. When Min says 'I'm a scientist,' and other kids say, 'No, you're not!' then there should be a facilitator, who tells Min, 'You're right! You are a scientist. Let's move on now,' in order to support his [social skills] that [are] weak. (August 2, 2013: 708)

Mrs. Y proactively supported and facilitated her son's interaction with other people outside the home, because she thought he needed extra help in that area. In addition to facilitating Min's social skills, she also emphasized raising him as a member of a society, which I describe in the following section.

Focus on Identity and Social Skills

Mrs. Y believed that as a mother, she needed to teach her child to be productive members of society. According to her belief, the role of mother was to "fully develop" a child's skills and help him "function fully" (August 27, 2013: 465) as a member of society and live a successful life as a social being. This was more important than "entering a prestigious university, becoming a medical doctor," she said, because she thinks "you feel most happy when you know your life is connected [to other people and society]" (August 27, 2012: 465).

To become a successful social being, Mrs. Y believed that her son needed to have a strong and healthy self-identity. Concerning her role in shaping his identity, Mrs. Y noted:

I try to instill a strong identity in Min. What I do at work is bridging my culture and mainstream culture, while clearly understanding my identity and feeling comfortable in both cultures. There are not many people out there like me, who are fully aware of who I am and what culture I have. (August 2, 2013: 113)

Here, Mrs. Y was projecting her experiences of developing balanced identities to her son. By highlighting the importance of navigating both her home culture and the mainstream U.S. culture, Mrs. Y hoped to model for her son how to master both worlds without losing one's self in the process. In addition to helping foster his sense of self, Mrs. Y noted the importance of stimulating Min's academic abilities.

Academic Support

At home, Mrs. Y taught Min English vocabulary and reviewed homework assignments with him. Focusing on his penchant for science, she tried to cultivate his scientific interests by doing activities together, such as watching "Bill Nye the Science Guy" and reading science textbooks. As a mother with a full-time job, she was aware that she could not do all she wanted to do with her son. She hired a tutor to help Min prepare for school life, focusing on "academics, self-discipline, intellectual interest/curiosity, hand writing,...not so much focus on academics but more on the attitudes, behaviors necessary for successful school life" (August 27, 2013: 611). She said the tutor did what she was supposed to do as a mother, that is, providing constant

academic support that would “lead into academic development in a non-threatening environment” (August 27, 2013: 604).

As a mother, Mrs. Y performed a role as an advocate, fortress builder, and facilitator. She also tried to help her son build a strong and healthy identity, as well as provide academic support. In performing these roles, she also had to grapple with other responsibilities, including her role as a daughter and a professional.

Transformation, Transition, Family Support

Mrs. Y perceived that she was going through a transition in her life. Her priorities were shifting from being a daughter and professional to being a mother and a wife. Family served a critical role in her transition.

Mrs. Y said that before she decided to prioritize childrearing over her work responsibilities, she did not consider herself as the main caretaker of her son. She did not have time to spend with him over the weekend due to her daytime work as a government employee and her second job as a *hagwon* director, and she was exhausted at home. She had mostly delegated her parenting responsibilities to her husband and her parents, especially her mother. When there had been any dilemma or problem, she just tried to “fix the situation” (August 2, 2013: 30):

In the past, I needed to fix the situation immediately [because I didn’t have much time]. If he didn’t conform, I raised my voice. If he showed an attitude, I approached it with a ‘fixing-the-situation’ mindset. (August 2, 2013: 30)

After Mrs. Y decided to adjust the priorities of her life, she tried to pay more attention to her son’s education and caretaking. Rather than fixing the problem, she asked more questions to engage in conversation with her son and give him time to

reflect on his behavior. She intentionally set aside a period of time where she could solely invest in them, and planned activities such as a weekend getaway to another city with no cell phone access. She intentionally chose activities that she thought could help them build strong rapport with each other. Other activities included making crafts, cooking, and baking. She planned activities that stimulated intellectual development such as doing research with Min when he was curious about concepts such as lava and volcanos. She felt spending more time with Min and expressing affection to him was helpful in building a strong mother-son relationship. Mrs. Y felt Min did not like his mother before she initiated these changes, because he mostly saw her angry. Now, she said she keeps her “composure and moves the situation to a positive direction. I feel improvements in my relationship with my children for sure” (August 2, 2013: 30).

Mrs. Y perceived her family’s support as critical in performing a mother’s role. Her mother was the main caretaker of her children, as well as the person who prepared meals and did other household chores. Her father was in charge of driving his grandchildren to afterschool programs. Her sister played a significant role facilitating her relationship with Min by giving her advice on how to communicate with Min and intervening when the emotions between Mrs. Y and her son escalated. Mrs. Y considered the family a team that worked to achieve common goals. In doing so, she believed that each family member, especially the mother, needed to sacrifice to a certain extent. She acknowledged that she was able to reach her goals with her parents’ support and sacrifice. Without them, she noted, “I would be a stay-home

mom who raises children and would not be able to do work for the benefits of many other people nor accomplish much at work” (August 27, 2013: 518).

Although she herself did not make the connection, Mrs. Y seemed to be conflicted between her role as a daughter, who tried to pay back the support and sacrifice her parents exhibited, and her role as a mother. She described the influence of her parents’ support in the decisions she made:

JHK: You have received lots of support from your parents since you came to the United States. How do you feel about that?

Mrs. Y: Yes, I feel the pressure all the time. When American people say what you think is more important than what your parents think, it’s only a fragment of the whole story. Of course how I feel is important. However, to me, what my parents think of me is very important as well. I feel it more strongly as I grow older. I was not aware of it when I was younger and less mature. Simply, I just wanted to finish my degree programs, stop receiving tuition support from them and help them as much as I could. Those are the surface level. My thinking is deeper than that now. Whatever I do, I consider my father’s and my mother’s perspectives. (August 27, 2013: 553-556)

She continued to talk about how she was aware that her parents were making sacrifices by choosing to come to the United States to support her life as a married professional. She said:

They had left what they had established in Korea and started over here.[...]
My parents’ position is basically, ‘We made effort in order to help you build a strong career in the United States and if you are not working to build your

career then we don't need to stay here [to help your childrearing].’ They would rather live in Korea if it were not for supporting me. (August 27, 2013: 560)

Mrs. Y’s focus on career advancement was a way to pay back the investment and sacrifice her parents made for her. She seemed to perceive that their reasons for staying in the United States placed pressure on her to be successful. When she decided to focus on her role as a mother, she faced multiple and somewhat conflicting obligations in fulfilling roles as a co-breadwinner, a professional, a successful daughter, and a caring and nurturing mother.

Summary

Mrs. Y believed she must be an advocate for her son in school and felt she should help him develop a strong identity and be successful in social contexts. She also believed that she had to foster her son’s intellectual curiosity and scientific interests, as well as protect him when he was with non-family members. As a mother with a full-time job, she tried to be strategic and efficient in the time she spent with her children. She was also experiencing a transition from being a daughter and a professional to being a mother and a wife. Her approach to mothering was evolving and was in transition from a withdrawn, laissez-fair, fix-the-problem approach to an engaging, involved, nurturing, and proactive approach. Her understanding of a mother’s role and prioritizing among different roles was situated within an extended family context.

Mrs. S

Access to the Site

I was introduced to Mrs. S by Mrs. J. The mothers met each other while both of their children were attending the same book club. On my first visit to Mrs. S's house in the summer of 2013, her children and others were playing together. After introducing ourselves, we went downstairs and observed her son Mike, who is in second grade, and his cousin playing with each other. The children and I used Korean when we talked, and they spoke English to each other. While the two boys played and interviewed one another for a summer camp homework assignment, Mrs. S and I watched them and talked informally at a small table surrounded by bookcases stacked with books and toys. The table seemed to be for children and was covered with stationary and school supplies such as pens, pencils, etc. After about 30 minutes, Mrs. S and I went upstairs, and the children went to bowling. We sat on her dining table and started the interview.

Introduction

Mrs. S lived with her husband and their children in Washington County, five minutes away from Mrs. J and Mrs. Y's homes. She was a full-time mother, and her husband was in the medical field. They moved to their current residence six years ago when her husband opened a clinic in the area. In her early 40s, Mrs. S was a petite woman who wore glasses and tied-back her hair. She had a friendly, social, and easy-going personality and liked to invite people over to her house, most of whom she met in her Korean ethnic churches.

As a result of her father's job as a public servant, Mrs. S grew up in different Korean cities. She moved often and did not like transferring in the middle of the semester, because she had to leave friends and make new ones in a new school. Her father was a man of high integrity, she recalled. She said her parents had interests and passion to support her education, but it did not turn out to be particularly helpful. She pointed out that when her father was given company housing, he decided to move in despite the school district's bad reputation. In her high school, Mrs. S was one of the top students academically. Teachers recognized her excellence publically, much to her discomfort because she did not want to stand out from her peers.

Mrs. S wanted to become a medical doctor, but her high school teacher persuaded her and her father to apply for a pharmacy program. The teacher said that a medical school would be too tough for girls and insisted that a pharmacist was a great occupation for a woman. She subsequently attended one of the top pharmacy programs in Korea and worked as pharmacist for several years before coming to the United States. Originally, she was unhappy about choosing the major, but currently she thought that the academic and professional experiences were useful; that being a pharmacist was actually a good occupation while raising children. She continued her graduate study in the United States and obtained a United States license. She planned to return to work in the future when her youngest child grew a little older.

Mrs. S and her husband came to the United States in 1999 for his graduate study. His relatives were living in the United States, and he had visited them when he was young. His sisters were attending U.S. graduate schools. Therefore, coming to

the United States and joining them was a not difficult decision for him to make. Mrs. S completed her graduate education in the United States.

When Mrs. S and her husband were choosing among various cities in which to open his clinic, they chose Washington County for its reputation for quality education. Mrs. S wanted to be surrounded by a community of other parents who were both concerned and involved in their children's education. Because she did not want her children to be "different" from others, she chose her children's school because it had some level of demographic diversity. Another reason she chose the school was because of its gifted and talented program. She had expected that at least one of her children would probably be accepted to the program, and she did not want to transfer her children to a school for it.

Although she did not have her family visiting from Korea to support her childrearing duties, she did not express as much hardship due to the lack of familial support as did Mrs. J and Mrs. K. She mentioned that her church community has been a strong support system that replaced the social support she might have received from family and friends in Korea. A couple of years ago, Mrs. S's sister and her sister's children came and lived with her family for a year. Her nieces went to school and summer camps with Mrs. S's children. Mrs. S also traveled to Korea with her children and sent her children to Korea regularly to visit with family and friends. During the summer that I collected the data for the present study, Mrs. S's nephew and his grandmother were staying with the family. When her nephew returned to Korea at the end of summer, she sent her son, Mike, with her nephew to spend about a month with his family in Korea.

In the following sections, I introduce Mrs. S's beliefs about a mother's role and her self-perception regarding the role. Her educational beliefs and perceptions are closely related to her perception about the minority status of her and her children.

Beliefs about a Mother's Role: "A Guardian" and Academic Support

Mrs. S saw a mother's role as a guardian who was sensitive to her children's needs and supports those needs. She said:

A mother's role. Hmm... Just being with them, being understanding, and helping them when they need help. Being sensitive to their needs; academic, religious, or in any aspect. A mom knows her children well or roughly at least. She can sense whether s/he has a concern, feels sad, or bored. And, [she's supposed to] support them until their adulthood, when they drive on their own and support themselves financially. A guardian, so to speak. I would help them as much as I can before they become independent. (August 22, 2013: 573)

She also added the importance of teaching children how to develop the habit of eating healthy food, not using screen time too much, and refraining from undesirable behaviors such as drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes.

She also thought she "needed to create an environment that allowed *gong-boo*, or studying, to occur naturally (August 1, 2013: 355). This notion was influenced by her perceptions about their minority status in American society. She said: "for a minority to live in the United States, you better do well in many areas" (August 1, 2013: 351). If they were to invest in many areas of their children's lives, she thought studying was the most cost-effective way to support children. Studying did not

require buying equipment such as musical instruments or sporting goods, nor did it require saving for the expense that comes with traveling. She said:

Mrs. S: *Gong-boo* (studying) doesn't need much equipment.

JHK: [The only equipment you need is] your brain...

Mrs. S: Violin, sports, it all costs a lot of money and driving and traveling are huge. Especially sports! Multiple trips a week for one child [is too much.] [So I thought] *gong-boo* would be the easiest way, compared to them. I'm saying easiest from a mom's perspective, not from the child's perspective. (August 1, 2013: 351-353).

Overall, Mrs. S frequently used the concept of efficiency when describing her parenting experiences. She described her life as a mother as hectic, but she described herself as easy-going and laid-back. She tried to approach her role by making it as manageable as possible in response to the perceived constraints. For example, she said she had her children take swimming classes simultaneously and guided them to learn the same musical instrument. She called it "a survival strategy of a mother with multiple children" (August 1, 2013: 367). She further illustrated the concept by comparing herself with Mrs. J, each of whose children played different instruments.

Mrs. S's academic support for her children included several activities. Mrs. S rented audio books from a local library and played them for her children. After her children listened to the books, she followed-up with questions about the content of the stories to check her children's comprehension. She also enrolled the children in summer camps and *hagwons*. She discussed the benefits of enrolling children in academically focused *hagwons*. First, in *hagwon* summer camps, children preview

materials they will cover in the upcoming school year, which prepares them such that they do not need to attend *hagwon* during the semester. Second, attending these camps helped the children practice studying for longer periods of time. Mrs. S said, “American kids [including Korean American ones] find it difficult to work for an extended period of time, if they don’t do it in a group environment” (August 22, 2013: 64) such as in *hagwon*. Another benefit of enrolling them in the camp was directly related to her own needs. When the children were in camp, she did not have to entertain the children all day. Lastly, another crucial consideration was that tuition for *hagwon* was not necessarily expensive compared to the hourly cost of individual private tutoring.

Mrs. S’s was encouraged to enroll her children in *hagwon* during the summer when her sister’s children visited from Korea several years ago. She perceived that their stay had a positive influence on her children’s academic behaviors. She said that her children learned the Korean style of studying from their cousins:

I did not make my children study from early on, compared to Mrs. J. I thought that having them work when they are a little more mature would be much more effective. I just let them loose. Then, my sister came, and my children went to *hagwon* with my nieces. My first one experienced *hagwon*, went to the library, and read books with his cousins. Having an opportunity to be exposed to the studying style in Korea [through their cousins], I think that [hosting my sister and her children] was helpful to my children academically. (August 22, 2013: 54)

Another one of Mrs. S's roles was to help her children maintain their heritage language. Although she was concerned that using Korean at home might interfere with English language development, she still wanted her children to be bilingual. Being bilingual presented several benefits, such as psychological development through learning to work with different systems of languages. During the study period, she sent Mike to Korea to stay with his cousins for about a month so he could improve his Korean language skills.

Interestingly, Mrs. S made the decision for her children to study Korean after their cousins' extended stay. Because the purpose of their cousins' stay in the United States was to improve their English language learning, she did not restrict the use of English at home. By the time the cousins left, her children mostly used English, and she perceived that her children's Korean proficiency had regressed. These experiences seemed to establish English as the main medium of interaction between her children and their cousins. Her son and his cousin from Korea spoke English when they were playing at home when I visited them. Mrs. S also showed me a video clip that Mike sent to her from Korea, in which he and his cousins were also speaking English. She said that her intention of sending him to Korea was to give him more exposure to Korean so he could improve his proficiency, but it did not seem to be successful, because she said he still used English to interact with his cousins in Korea.

Perceived Disadvantages

As an immigrant mother, Mrs. S perceived that her children were relatively disadvantaged compared to their native English-speaking peers. To respond to these disadvantages, she said that Korean immigrant mothers made their children work hard

to make up for the disadvantages in terms of language development. Mrs. S explained why she thought Korean immigrant mothers made their children work hard:

I think it's because Korean children lag behind White students in language abilities. I think the gap widens as they grow up. When they start (in lower grades), [Korean kids] do much better. In first and second grades they do better. When they reach third and fourth grades, they become average. I think I saw this on the (ethnic) newspaper recently as well. When they reach seventh and eighth grades, they lag behind by one to two years in many cases. They always hear English from their American parents, and it expands their vocabulary naturally. As for us, many parents speak Korean at home. Our children only [learn] English from what they learn in school, what they do on their own, and what summer vacation. During the break, if they play for two to three months without studying,... [they would fall behind.] (August 22, 2013: 19).

Most of Korean immigrant families spoke Korean at home, which significantly reduced the children's exposures to a variety of English vocabulary, she said. From her perspective, children of Korean immigrants might appear to do better than their peers in kindergarten or in lower elementary grades, but many of them lag behind as their grade levels advanced. In comparison, "American students" had ample opportunities to expand their vocabulary, according to her description. She thought they were exposed to more English language at home through interaction with family members and relatives. She said American parents do not make their children work as much as and as early as Korean mothers because "they don't feel the need" (August

22, 2013: 160). She called this “the ease of mind of those who have” (August 22, 2013:162) compared to immigrant mothers who “did not have.” She said she heard American children only needed help for math, not in English. “They may not look like they do a lot, but they actually have lots of tutoring, rather than going to *hagwon*, I heard,” she added (August 22, 2013: 70). She also said this was why Korean immigrant mothers made their children work hard, especially during summer break.

As she was making the case for Korean immigrant mothers’ academic involvement, her description of “American students” and “American parent” indicated that she was referring to a certain group of students and parents. Specifically, she was comparing children who perform well in school and receive significant support from their parents and who could afford tutoring and other educational support. This imagined selective group of children and their parents reflects a more privileged group in terms of language ability and possibly in the perceived racial hierarchy, although she did not specify whether she was referring to Whites when she used the word “American.” She designated the privileged group as one that her children and other children of Korean immigrant families might lag behind. This sense of having a concern over being disadvantage is interesting, especially considering that her school-aged children were all in gifted and talented programs. I interpret this as emanating from the sense of competition carried from the Korean educational context, which is infected by high competition.

Mrs. S also mentioned and refuted stereotypes about Asian American children and their parents. She mentioned the perception that Asian children earned high scores on tests because they practiced. She also felt that the increased participation of

many Asian American children in the gifted and talented programs have resulted in recent changes in admission policies to the programs and how exceptional students are measured. She believed policies were changed because there were a disproportionately large number of Asian American students admitted to the program. Furthermore, the magnet high school specialized in math and science and changes were intended to lower the proportion of Asian American students. Mrs. S argued that they were not the only ones who practiced for tests. She noted that preparatory materials were sold on Amazon.com; therefore, others besides Asian American parents were purchasing them. She also introduced me to a blog on which American parents shared information on their children's education. She pointed out that they were exchanging information related to placement tests. It was her opinion that Korean mothers who shared information on websites that used the Korean language might be less aggressively involved in preparing their children for placement tests.

School Involvement

When it comes to school visits, Mrs. K said, "Here, you can choose to do very much and you can also choose to do very little. Even if you do nothing, it's not like mothers ostracize you" (August 1, 2013: 160). She admitted that she was not heavily involved in school events such as parties or the PTA. In fact, she distanced herself from those who were heavily involved in school activities, saying that she did not get involved in school events actively. Based on her experience, she knew which events in which to participate. After a trial and error period, she focused on events that most parents attended, such as a parent-teacher conference and chose not attend those in which a small number of parents participated, such as an ice cream social. In addition

to language constraints, cultural differences, and time constraints, her selective participation in school events spoke to her personality that she described as easy-going and far from having a life-or-death attitude. She admitted to trying to make everything workable and manageable for her life style as a mother of four children.

Summary

Having four children, and with a focus on efficiency, Mrs. S was trying to make her responsibilities as a parent as manageable as possible. As an immigrant mother, she believed that achievements in academics, compared to achievements in sports and classical music, were a better way for her children to achieve as a racial minority in the United States. She was committed to creating an environment conducive to focusing on academic studying and provided academic enrichment programs for her children. Transnational visits and the extended stay of her sister and her sister's children from Korea influenced Mrs. S's support behaviors. She perceived the relatives' stay as a positive influence on her children's academic activities but also a mixed influence on maintaining their heritage language. She also selectively involved her children in school activities based on her evaluation of each event. Finally, she was critical of the stereotypical image of Asian mothers and children and refuted the idea.

Mrs. K

Access to the Site

I was introduced to Mrs. K by Mrs. S; they attended the same church. Mrs. K was a perfect candidate to interview because after a preliminary analysis of other cases, I was interested in looking at how having a job might influence a mother's

involvement. We communicated via Kakao Talk⁴ and scheduled to meet. She preferred a week day evening, because she was busy driving children to different extracurricular activities during the weekends.

The first interview with Mrs. K occurred on a week day evening in March 2014. I arrived at her house before she returned from work; therefore, I had the chance to chat with her children as we all waited for her. When she arrived home, the children all gathered around her at the dinner table and tried to talk to her about various things that had happened during the day. While having dinner, we also talked about Korean television shows and Korean celebrities. As they finished their dinner, the young children brought their homework to their mother; she reviewed it and signed off on it. A great deal of affection was shown during the process. She and the younger children, especially Minnie, patted, touched, and hugged each other and kissed on the cheeks frequently. After dinner, she and I went upstairs to her bedroom for an interview. Mrs. K sat on the bed, and I sat on a chair in front of a computer desk next to the bed. The interview was conducted in a relaxed atmosphere. She attentively listened to my questions and responded in a soft voice.

Introduction

Mrs. K lived in a townhome community about seven miles from where the other three mothers lived. She worked for a small company, and her husband was an instructor in higher education. In her mid-40s, Mrs. K was a tall lady with mid-length hair and glasses with a soft smile and composed voice. Overall, my impression was

⁴ A widely used Korean mobile/web application with which you can send text, pictures, files and voice messages.

that she was nice, gentle, and calm. She appeared to work to remain optimistic even in the face of difficulty.

Born and raised in Seoul, Korea, Mrs. K was the middle child among three. She described her upbringing as ordinary. She said her mother referred to her as a “normal daughter who took care herself” and was “the easiest to raise” among the three (April 23, 2014; 137). A devout Christian, her mother held a family worship service every night at home, during which the family gathered and read the Bible. Mrs. K said she would like to do the home worship with her husband and children as well, but she was not successful keeping it as a routine.

She reported that she maintained a high GPA in school and “therefore [her] school life was not too difficult” (March 26, 2014: 271). However, she described school as boring, and she felt like escaping the drudgery each school day brought to her. She admitted that as an immature high school student, she secretly wished that the school would catch fire so that she did not have to go. I related to her comments, because this was one of the common jokes that my friends and I used to share as well.

Her love of the English language and her aspirations to study abroad began during her early teenage years. When she began to learn English as a subject in middle school, she fell in love with the language. She enjoyed studying it and worked hard to become better at it. She almost memorized her textbook, and she listened to tape recordings of the text narrated by native speakers of English. She wished to major in English in college, but her CSAT, or *suneung*, score was not good enough to gain admittance into the English department in her preferred university. She chose social science instead. She thought that there would be opportunities to study English

in the future and that social science would be a good foundation for any field of study when she advanced to a graduate program. While she did not have ambitious plans to thrive in academia, she vaguely thought she would like to study more) after getting a bachelor's degree.

After marriage, Mrs. K and her husband came to the United States in 1995 as international graduate students to fulfill their dreams for graduate study in the United States. In the first state in which they lived, she did not observe much racial diversity. There were few Koreans in her neighborhood and few chances to speak Korean. She used English most of the time and watched American television shows. While she felt her English improving a great deal, she still struggled to follow the discussions in graduate-level courses. Her lack of background knowledge about the U.S. context was another challenge she faced in keeping up with course content.

She had to quit her graduate study in 1997 when the Asian financial crisis impacted the Korean economy (usually referred to as "IMF crisis" in Korea). She was unable to receive enough supplementary financial support from her parents in Korea, because the value of Korean currency plummeted. She had her first child around that time, and continuing her studies became even more challenging. She stopped her graduate studies and began to work and support her husband who continued his graduate program. She explained that she did not take any break from work except when she had newborn babies.

Her interest in academic support motivated her to work for different educational services, including tutoring and learning centers. Mrs. K felt that supporting her husband's study and the family cost her opportunities to build her own

career. She regretted that she had not finished her graduate work, and she sometimes felt a little envious of her former colleagues who were able to continue their academic pursuits. Her current goal, however, was to provide financial support and a more comfortable life to her and her family. She also seemed happy that her current job might help her husband open his own business. Overall, she seemed to be satisfied with her life now.

Mrs. K talked to family in Korea on a regular basis, but admitted she lost contact with most of her friends in Korea. When she and her husband were students, she visited Korea every year, but at the time of the interview they only traveled occasionally to Korea. Her family and in-laws visited them in the United States once over the course of several years, and she also occasionally sent her children to visit her family in Korea.

In the following sections, I introduce Mrs. K's beliefs about a mother's role, constraints that she perceived in performing the role successfully, and the peer pressure that she felt. Then, I discuss how media products made in Korea, such as television programs, were used as educational material for her children's Korean language development.

Beliefs about a Mother's Role: Academic Support

While Mrs. K briefly mentioned the importance of building her children's character, describing her role as a mother focused on providing academic support for her children. She explained:

Schooling is the biggest part of their lives at this moment, and those who do well academically receive compliments and tend to build self-confidence in

school. Therefore, in order to be happy in school [you better perform well academically]. I don't want them to feel less confident about themselves or feel depressed because they don't perform well academically. So, I would like to support them academically at least while they're in school. (April 23, 2013: 8-10)

She also believed that as a mother, her role was to help her children "have fun while studying, so that they can enjoy it" (April 23, 2013: 16). This comment reflected her positive learning experiences with English when she was a secondary student. She loved learning and mastering the English language, and she wanted to be good at it. Therefore, she worked hard to gain greater English proficiency. As a mother, she tried to instill the joy of learning in her children as well.

Mrs. K had ideas about educational activities that would be helpful for her children. Some of those educational activities included reading the same book that her child was reading and "[to sit] by their side and [monitor] their reading assignment" (March 26, 2013: 147) every day. She felt it was important for children to develop a habit of working independently especially because she could not afford to enroll them in *hagwons*. The activities she planned for her children were mostly not actualized to the extent she wanted. She regretted her inability to implement supplemental educational support successfully and at the level she desired. Her feelings were conveyed in her words such as *mianhada* ("feeling sorry" or "feeling apologetic/guilty") and *maumhee apeuda* ("feeling heartbroken"). Reflecting on her own experiences in the past, she regretted not being able to afford more educational services for her children:

My parents couldn't afford hiring a tutor for me [when I was in high school].

So I regret that I could have gone to a better university if only I had some help from tutoring. Now, I think I should be a capable parent who can afford what my children need, [but I'm not]. I feel bad (*mianhan maeum*) about it. (April 23, 2013: 137)

As she tried to implement her ideals of academic support, Mrs. K perceived having a full-time job as a significant constraint. She lacked the time and energy needed to work with her children when she came home from work. She said:

I think I almost leave them neglected. I mean, I can't do what I planned. On my way home, I would plan to do certain things, until [a] certain time. I think to myself, 'I would review their homework quickly and do extra work with them, and then do this and that with them.' But, after I come home and eat dinner, I get loose. I can't do things as I planned. I would just say, 'Ah, let's do it tomorrow,' or 'Let's just call it a day here.' I feel sorry and guilty (*mianhada*) [for my kids]. Having kids study, working with them as following a plan, all of these are a mother's job. (March 26, 2013: 448)

Here, Mrs. K expressed a strong sense of responsibility regarding her role of providing educational support for her children and how having a full-time job presented constraints in fulfilling her role as a mother.

Comparing with Peers

Comparing herself with some other Korean (immigrant) mothers, Mrs. K said she "[did] not pay too much attention to care for her children's education, therefore [she did] not have any special know-how" (April 23, 2013: 4). She said she was not

like some other Korean (immigrant) mothers who “hold kids down and make them work a lot” (March 26, 2013: 59). The reference group to which she compared herself was a certain group of mother she had in mind.

Mrs. K’s sense of frustration that she could not provide for her children as much as she desired was exacerbated by perceived peer pressure when she compared herself against other Korean immigrant parents. She said, “I feel bad and sorry (*mianhada*) that we don’t do those things for my kids.[...] Everybody does camps. Academics, sports, music lessons, they all do those activities. I’ve never been able to do them for my children” (April 23, 2013: 173). When I told her that feeling sorry seemed to be common among many Korean immigrant mothers, she responded in a slightly heightened voice:

Is it so? Am I not the only one? But I can’t give them much financially. It looks like I’m the only one who’s having a hard time. It looks like other mothers do everything. They send their kids to summer camps, [extracurricular] lessons. (April 23, 2013: 174)

Notably, Mrs. K was comparing herself with mothers that she perceived had no problems and were able to spare the money and time for their children’s extra educational support. Despite the fact that she supported violin lessons, weekend activities for her children, and helped with their homework assignments, she judged that she was not doing enough. Comparing herself with aspiring peers exacerbated her feeling of frustration and made her feel “pity for her children” (April 23, 2013: 137).

Despite her self-perception and peer pressure, she also indicated optimism. She said by having a good relationship with her husband, she was setting a good example for her children:

I heard a lot that the best education that parents can give to the children is maintaining a good relationship with each other as a couple and eating and talking around a dinner table as a family.[...] Thankfully, my husband and I don't have any problems; rather, we're on great terms. By showing (my children) that we're affectionate to each other, I think we are doing a good job. (April 23, 2013: 185)

Here, Mrs. K seemed to find solace in an alternative way of supporting her children's education such as modeling good relationships and setting a good example as a married couple.

Mrs. K and her husband discussed and made decisions regarding their children's education together. In addition to the strong relationship that they forged, there were several alternative ways that her family leveraged the resources that they had. Her husband worked in the evening; therefore, he took care of the children when Mrs. K was not around during the day. The children had "Dad's homework"—doing one page of an on-grade level workbook, reading Korean books, exercising, etc. Mrs. K admitted, however, that this time was not well-supervised. Although she and her husband could not afford summer camps, her husband offered his version of summer camp at home. Mrs. K reported that he put up a sign that read "Mr. K's Camp" and pretended they were participating in a camp. All of these activities were possible

because their father was good at sports and music, and he had the education and English proficiency necessary for him to contribute to their children's education.

Mrs. K also involved herself in the children's school activities to the best of her abilities. Although she could not participate in PTA due to scheduling conflicts and her language constraints, she said she always tried to respond to emails from schoolteachers and fellow parents regarding school events. She also participated in most of the fundraising activities at school. She never missed an open house or parent-teacher conferences that were held in the evening. In doing so, she tried to show that she cared and was interested in supporting her children's education.

Meaning of Korea: a Cultural Home in Virtual Space

To Mrs. K, Korea was a physical space that seemed to exist in the past. She said she has lost most of her contact with friends in Korea. She did not mention any possibility of returning to Korea to live. Even so, Korea had a strong presence in her life in the forms of television shows, news, and YouTube videos. Mrs. K tried to watch Korean television programs with her children. She hoped that more exposure to Korean language and culture would have a positive influence on their motivation and interest in learning about them. Indeed, her first child was proficient in Korean and had an up-to-date knowledge about Korean dramas and celebrities. He also translated our conversation in Korean to English for her younger siblings when they did not understand or could not follow the story. The younger children were not as proficient as their older brother and did not seem to be as interested in and excited about the stories as him. Even so, they still engaged in the conversation that was conducted in both English and Korean.

Summary

Mrs. K's description of her role focused on academic and extracurricular support for her children. Her self-perception of doing a mediocre job supporting her children's education understated the support she and her husband were actually providing. Comparing herself with others among her peer network exacerbated her feelings of regret that she could not provide as much as she wanted to provide for her children. However, she was confident in her ability to set a good example for her children through her marriage. For Mrs. K, Korean media products available via the internet were a conduit for Korean language and culture.

Summary

In this chapter, I have reported the key findings of each case. In the next chapter, I discuss how the findings are situated in multiple layers of contexts and connected with the existing research and literature.

Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion

In the previous chapter, I highlighted findings that were relevant to the mothers' beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors around their parental roles. In Mrs. J's case, relevant themes were her resistance to her mother's over involvement in her life decision-making and educational choices, the gap between the high ideals she holds for acceptable motherhood and her self-perception, and her constant efforts to fulfill those same high ideals in her own role as a mother. To her, Korea was thought of as a better place for mothers to raise their children as well as a place where she experienced "healing" and self-reflection that helped her become a more mature mother. In this sense, Korea existed in her past experiences, but it also was influential in her present as she made sense of her role as a mother.

Another mother described her role in a different way. Mrs. Y articulated her role in her son's life by focusing on building on his potential, responding to his curiosity about nature and science and supplementing his weaknesses with social skills. Her experiences as a first generation immigrant professional involved in a "mainstream" workplace and coming in contact with other ethnic and racial groups influenced her emphasis on her son's identity development in social context. She hoped that he could feel comfortable in both Korean and American cultures. Assuming multiple roles as a mother, a wife, a daughter, and a professional, she seemed to be conflicted by her perceptions of different responsibilities. She was the least involved in transnational interaction (i.e., travels to Korea and communication with people in Korea, and consumption of Korean media products). However, when

she discussed her upbringing experiences she still used transnational comparisons referencing back to Korean contexts of the past.

Mrs. S used the concepts of efficiency and manageability to describe her parenting. Compared to other participants, she did not say much about ideals or aspiring examples that she tried to emulate as a mother. Unlike Mrs. J and Mrs. K, she did not feel bitter about not doing enough for her children. She refuted the stereotypical images of “Asian moms” as aggressively involved with their kids’ lives and constantly prepping their kids for tests. Rather, Mrs. S took examples from other non-Asian mothers who were deeply involved in their children’s lives, including those who actively shared information about admissions to gifted and talented programs in a blog. She also situated Korean American children’s academic experiences in a larger context, comparing them with their selected group of “American” peers from English-speaking American families. The visitation of a sister and her children from Korea played a role in the way she involved herself in her children’s education and their usage of Korean language.

Similar to Mrs. Y, Mrs. K also struggled between the ideal motherhood practices that she hoped to perform and the constraints she believed that made it difficult to be an ideal mother. She was influenced by peer pressure as illustrated when she explained her feelings associated with not being able to offer as much as she would like to her children. Mrs. K found alternative ways to involve in her children’s education within her capacity. Korean television shows served as key transnational resources to help maintain her children’s heritage language. To her,

Korea existed in her past experiences related to her upbringing and in the present through virtual space and communications with her extended family in Korea.

Mothers' Behaviors and Beliefs

In this section, I discuss the mothers' beliefs and behaviors related to the academic supports they provided for their children. Next, I compare and contrast how they described and perceived themselves according to common themes.

Academic Support

All of the mothers had a strong sense of responsibility and ownership in supporting their children's education. They were strongly committed and dedicated to providing the support that they thought was helpful to their children. All of the mothers in my study saw themselves as the main person responsible for providing academic support to their children.

Mrs. K and Mrs. S eloquently described academic support systems they provided for their children. Mrs. K thought her children would be happier when they performed better academically. She also hoped to help them learn how to enjoy studying instead of seeing it as drudgery. The minority status of her children molded the supports Mrs. S offered. Since her children were racial and ethnic minorities, her children needed to be advanced in many academic and social areas. Therefore, she tried to create an environment that was conducive to learning outside school. Her comments suggest her belief that minority groups need to make an extra effort to be better to mitigate the influences of discrimination and expect a fair return on the efforts and accomplishments. While both Mrs. K and Mrs. S had somewhat different perspectives, the importance that they placed on academic supports was based on

their beliefs about what would be good and helpful for their children in their educational contexts.

Overall, the mothers had concrete ideas about what they were supposed to do in order to support their children's education, especially their academic development. In some cases, their views were established from their own professions. Mrs. Y possessed a strong knowledge and understanding about the American education system and school curriculum developed during her time as a tutor and *hagwon* owner. Similar to Mrs. Y, Mrs. K had experiences working in the educational services sector. Mrs. J also had knowledge of and experiences with special education and understood the resources that helped her support Amy's language development. Unfortunately, in Mrs. J's case, her knowledge had mixed influences on her. Knowing the limitations of Amy's development caused her to feel both hopeful and frustrated.

One common thread in the mothers' efforts to provide academic support was that they believed that outside school assignments and extra work was needed to bolster the academic success of their children. Private educational services seemed to be a natural option. The mothers were willing to pay for private educational services such as academics-focused summer camps run by *hagwons* and private tutoring. Mrs. J and Mrs. S enrolled her children in *hagwon*-based summer camps and a book club during the time of the study. Mrs. Y's son had a tutor. Mrs. K explained she could not afford private academic services but she admitted that she would provide extra educational experiences for her child if her financial condition allowed. She tried to instill self-directed learning habits in her children because she felt that she "could not

afford enrolling them in *hagwon*” or “manage giving rides” to different *hagwons* (April 23, 2014: 16). At home, Mrs. K actively sought to provide alternative forms of support such as helping with homework or offering a quasi-summer camp with the help of her husband. Across all the cases, the mothers expected their children to work for extra hours outside school. The extra work was regarded as natural and desirable and in three cases private supplementary education services existed as an easy option to choose when the mothers could afford them.

School Involvement

The mothers in the study differed in their involvement in school-led activities. Mrs. S was not an avid participant in PTA and other school events. Based on her prior experience with school involvement, she said she knew enough to discern a must-go event from an event such as an ice cream social that only “5-10% of the mothers would go to.” Having more time constraints due to her full-time job, Mrs. K tried to involve herself in such activities communicating with the teachers via emails and contributing money to fund-raising. Mrs. Y also did not attend school events frequently. However, she voiced her opinions to teachers and the principal when appropriate. For example, she responded quickly and assertively when she was called to the principal’s office to talk about her son’s behavior. Depending on the context and her comfort level, Mrs. J’s school-related involvement differed from one school to another. While she did not participate in her first child’s school because she felt excluded and unwelcomed by other parents, she helped her other two daughters’ teachers with compiling work folders and other tasks for the whole school year. Mrs. S summarized parents’ school involvement by pointing out that you can choose to

involve yourself a lot or not to involve yourself at all and it did not cause you to be ostracized by your peers. Her point of view is in contrast to the mainstream ideal of parents' active participation in school events in the United States.

The mothers in the study often participated in their children's education in ways that may not be seen as engaged or involved by accepted norms of parental school involvement. If certain forms of involvement such as school visits and PTA participation are to be considered as more salient than others, my participants' selective participation (see S. Lee, 2005) in school contexts belie their educational support outside school. In fact, the mothers were significantly engaged in their children's education outside school. There were many examples that demonstrated that these mothers were involved in their children's education. Mrs. K monitored and assisted with the children's homework assignment; Mrs. S and Mrs. J enrolled her children into academic-focused summer camps run by *hagwons*; Mrs. S took her children to the library and rented books and audiobooks; and Mrs. Y hired a tutor for her son and watched Bill Nye the Science Guy with him. Even though it appeared as if the mothers were not involved actively in school contexts, they supported their children's education in numerous ways outside the school setting. Clearly, a conventional school-centered conceptualization of parent involvement will not capture their deep commitment in their children's education.

Self-perception

How the mothers perceived themselves vis-à-vis their roles as mothers differed across cases. In Mrs. J and Mrs. K's cases, a gap existed between their ideals about mothering and their self-perceptions. Mrs. J compared herself against her high

ideals, which were inspired by her reflection on her own upbringing experiences. She perceived that although she worked hard to meet her own high expectations, she remained far from the ideals and she tried to close the gap by carefully watching her words and behaviors. Mrs. K also had high expectations for her role in supporting her children. She hoped to do several activities with her children after she came home from work, but many times she could not fulfill those wishes because she was tired. She also regretted she could not afford *hagwons* and other extracurricular activities for her children due to fiscal constraints. However, she supported her children as much as she could within her financial capacities. She also took pride that she and her husband set a positive example by keeping a strong relationship and thought their marriage itself would serve as another form of education for their children.

Mrs. Y was undergoing a transition into a mother who spends more time with her son and is more interested in his development and education. She prided herself on being understanding and tolerant of her son's behaviors. She was candid about her behavioral patterns before she decided to transform her approach to childrearing, and her changes in approach seemed to satisfy her. She saw herself as being strategic, effective, and efficient in spending time with her child. Like Mrs. Y, Mrs. S also used efficiency in describing her role as a mother with multiple children and her involvement in children's education.

The mothers compared themselves to others when thinking about the educational support they provided their children. Mrs. Y was the only one who described herself as a "helicopter mom" who was heavily involved in her child's education, but clearly each mother was deeply involved with their children. Mrs. J did

not describe herself as a heavily involved mother, but stated that she had a tendency to push her children in a direction that she thought was best for them. Mrs. K and Mrs. S explicitly described themselves as less involved and laid-back than some of their peers. Mrs. K compared herself positively to some other Korean immigrant mothers who “hold kids down and make them work a lot” (Mrs. K, March 26, 2014: 59). Comparing herself to Mrs. J who hired different music tutors for her children, Mrs. S said she hired one music tutor for all of her children to save time and energy.

To conclude, the mothers differed in how they perceived and described their roles as mothers. In Mrs. J and Mrs. K’s cases, the gap between their ideals and their own self-perceptions seemed to be a common theme. Efficiency was a common concept that Mrs. Y and Mrs. S used to describe their approaches, while Mrs. Y added a description of what she viewed as a transition in her role to highlight the changes that she was making in her mothering practices. The mothers had different self-perceptions about how involved they were in children’s education.

Factors of Beliefs and Practices

Multiple factors influenced the mothers’ beliefs and behaviors related to their mothering. These factors include family support, the transmission of parent roles, and resources.

Family Support

Each mother had different kinds and amount of family support. Among the four participants, Mrs. Y received the most extensive support from her family due to the close proximity. She lived with her parents and her sister who helped her significantly with child rearing. Strong support emerged partly because her family

had a strong belief and sense of a family community aimed at helping each other. She considered her family as a collaborative team that worked together to accomplish common goals and whose members are willing to make sacrifices for other members. As such, she considered family support as central to her performing a maternal role.

However, complex consequences accompanied the support Mrs. Y received from her parents. In the past, she was able to focus on her two jobs because her parents shared the childrearing and housework load with her. Due to the extensive amount of time spent on her career, she found herself not spending as much time with her children and she decided to adjust her priorities and focus more on her role as a mother. She was somewhat conflicted regarding her parent's support. On one hand, she felt grateful for the support displayed for her education, childcare, and housework. On the other hand, she felt pressure from her parents to be successful in her field. She also felt somewhat concerned because her parents were living in the United States to support her childcare and domestic duties. They made it clear that their stay in the United States was for the purpose of supporting her career advancement and self-realization. She confessed that she felt a burden to pay her parents back by being recognized as a successful professional. In this sense, while her parents' support was helpful and indispensable in actualizing her beliefs as a mother and a professional, it was also a source of pressure to Mrs. Y to succeed as a professional and in fact it may have deterred her from choosing to be a full-time mother.

Compared to Mrs. Y, whose mothering was supported significantly by her family, Mrs. J and Mrs. K felt isolated especially during their early childrearing years.

The lack of social support was more pronounced because few Korean people lived nearby in the neighborhood that they had lived then. The struggle was particularly challenging for Mrs. J who assumed a role of an in-home special education teacher for her first daughter, who had hearing impairment. Mrs. S explained that her Korean church community has been helpful and supportive in her childrearing experiences. In Mrs. S's case, although her parents or in-laws visited the United States and helped with the childrearing duties from time to time, her church community supplemented the absence of extended family support.

When it comes to spousal support, all four mothers felt that their husbands were helpful and supportive in their children's education endeavors. However, while the other three mothers described their husbands' help more in terms of caring and spending time with their children, Mrs. K's husband was the most actively involved in academic assistance. Although she lamented that she could not afford summer camps and extracurricular activities for her children, her husband offered a quasi-summer camp at home. This was possible because he could swim, play the guitar, and had necessary knowledge and skills to teach children academics.

Transmission of Parent Roles

Mrs. Y and Mrs. J described their parental roles by many references to their own mothers. First, Mrs. Y described the importance of sacrifice within a mother's role. Making a sacrifice was strongly present in the conversation that I had with Mrs. Y's mother. Mrs. Y's description of a mother's role utilizing the word sacrifice seemed in conflict with her desire and responsibility to advance herself as a professional woman in some ways. While she was receiving her mother's support,

which was made possible by her mother's sacrifice, she also needed to be a mother who supports her children by her own sacrifice. Her own mother's sacrifice was evidenced in the support she received: her mother would rather live in Korea if it were not for supporting Mrs. Y. Conversely, while it was her conscious and purposeful choice, Mrs. Y's decision to change her priorities among multiple roles can be a form of sacrifice, because she closed down her *hagwon* in order to spend more time with her son.

Mrs. J's reactions to her mother's way of raising her deeply impacted her own idealistic image of motherhood. Mrs. J felt constrained by her mother's strong influences in making decisions in her life. She wanted to be a different type of mother for her own children. Instead of the pushy, over-involved model of motherhood her own mother provided she hoped to establish an image of the best mother who as she noted, "cooks delicious foods and just says 'yes, yes, you did a good job' to her children no matter what, and who is warm and comfortable" (July 29, 2013: #598). However, as much as she tried to become a carefree mother, who exerted a minimal influence on her children, she found herself doing the same things she wanted to avoid. She tried hard to control her words and interactions with her children to become closer to her ideal image of a mother. She said changing her style to what she believed was more desirable was difficult "maybe because it's in my blood" (July 29, 2013: 541). She attributed her inclination to be involved to her own upbringing and suggested her tendency to mirror the actions of her late mother's.

To summarize, Mrs. J and Mrs. Y's beliefs and perceptions regarding their role as mothers were situated in their specific family contexts. Their beliefs about

parent roles were transmitted or avoided from one generation to another. This illustrates the impact of transnational contexts that involved both Korean and American settings.

Resources

Social class was an important factor that influenced how the mothers in this study implemented their beliefs in practices. Their involvement in their children's education was determined by factors including the families' economic resources, the mothers' education, and language.

All of my participants' middle- to upper-middle class backgrounds granted access to a variety of resources that they utilized to support their children's education. In addition to extracurricular activities, including music lessons and martial arts, Mrs. S, Mrs. J, and Mrs. Y could afford private supplementary education including tutoring and academically focused summer camps. While Mrs. K could not afford *hagwons*, she could still pay for a small amount of extracurricular opportunities for their children.

In addition to their financial resources, the mothers' education and work experiences served as resources for the support of their children's education. Mrs. J's background in special education and her experiences as a bilingual special education teacher were a critical resource that she activated. However, while her education and work experience supported her children's education, the same professional attributes worked to complicate her parenting experiences as well. Equipped with relevant knowledge and experiences, she was both hopeful and confident in her ability to support her daughter's language development while feeling hopeless because she

knew there would be an inevitable limit to her development. She confessed that she had thought she would do an excellent job teaching her daughter but felt devastated when it did not go as she expected.

Mrs. Y's educational and professional experiences had a significant role in her ability to perform her numerous roles as advocate, fortress builder, facilitator, and academic support provider. Her background in psychology and nursing compelled her to view the ADHD issue raised by her son's teacher from multiple critical perspectives. Because of her language proficiency, she was able to express her feelings and ideas to the teacher and principal, and intercede with her son's peers and their parents if they deemed any of his behavioral issues problematic. Her full-time job, which required community outreach to different ethnic groups, compelled her to emphasize building a strong identity and understanding of oneself in relation to others. Her experiences tutoring Korean American children worked to her strong advantage by equipping her with an acute understanding of the school curriculum and various educational support materials.

Interestingly, despite all the resources that the mothers had at their disposal, not all the mothers seemed to acknowledge these assets but instead chose to focus on what they did not have. Specifically, although Mrs. K monitored her children's homework assignments and enrolled them to extracurricular activity classes, Mrs. K still felt frustration when comparing herself with her peers who she perceived could afford more private education.

To summarize, the parents' beliefs and behaviors regarding mothering were influenced by several factors. First, availability of support from their families,

including parents, a sibling, and husbands. In other cases, their practices were influenced by their perceptions about their mothers' parenting. Lastly, while the amount of resources and how they used them were varied, all the families benefited from the mothers' and the husbands' education and financial resources.

Transnationalism

All four mothers in the study were engaged in transnationalism in different ways and to different degrees. In this section, I group their behaviors related to transnationalism into three categories, i.e. transnational comparing/referencing, transnational travels/interactions, and transnational media.

Transnational Comparing and Referencing

There were three kinds of transnational comparing and referencing found in the four cases of Korean immigrant mothers. These were pre-migration transnational imagination about the United States, transnational comparison between the United States and Korea, and transnational future projection.

Prior to migrating to the United States, the four mothers in the study had images of the United States as a better place. They came to the United States for their own or their spouses' undergraduate or graduate education (Mrs. K, Mrs. S, Mrs. Y) or a work opportunity (Mrs. J). Mrs. K and Mrs. Y pursued graduate study in the United States. Mrs. K' husband had a plan to attend U.S. graduate school and Mrs. K wanted an American graduate education. Mrs. Y had long dreamed of coming to the United States to study, partly inspired by a Korean man's autobiographical book describing his experiences in American high school and his eventual graduation from Harvard University. Compelled by numerous factors, the hope for opportunities in the

United States drew the mothers and their spouses to come to the United States for something better than what was available in Korea.

Their imagination and dream of living in the United States was also facilitated by their relatives and family members who were already in the United States. Before their migration, Mrs. S and Mrs. J had family members who were living in the U.S. Mrs. S's sister-in-law was already attending an American graduate school and when he was younger her husband visited his relatives in the United States. Mrs. J was able to get a job as a special education teacher after she visited her sister who was studying voice in the United States. For Mrs. Y, having relatives in the United States served as partial motivation to immigrate. Overall, having someone from their immediate and extended family living in the United States helped them think of their international transition as something both possible and feasible.

Although the mothers' original motivation to come to the United States was not directly related to their children, their reasons of staying here in the United States included the educational welfare of their children. The mothers viewed the United States as a better place for their children especially related to education. Mrs. J explained that Korea would be a better place for mothers, but her children were better off in the United States because they did not have to experience academic pressure they would be subject to in Korea. In addition, although Mrs. S was critical about excessive competition and academic pressure in Korea, she felt the Korean style of studying was positive. She believed that her nieces and nephew from Korea had a positive influence on her children's academic behaviors.

Contrary to my assumptions and overall impression about immigrants, the United States was not always thought of as a better place for all the mothers. Mrs. J was actually indifferent about living in the United States. Although she came here thinking that work experience in the United States might benefit her, her decision to remain was not entirely planned out. She recalled that she had only vague ideas about settling down permanently when she married to her Korean American husband. In reality, she felt she would enjoy more benefits as a mother if she had lived in Korea. She missed the support she would gain from being around friends. She felt that if she lived in Korea, she could just call up her friend and ask a question (e.g., ask for a good tennis coach for her children), readily would receive an answer. The six months she stayed in Korea gave her access to social supports that did not seem available to her in the United States.

The transnational perspective impacted the mothers' views of their children's future education. At least two of the mothers, Mrs. J and Mrs. S, considered that their children would enroll in schools in Korea. Mrs. J said she would like to enroll her children in Korean school, but in actuality it will not happen because she does not want the family to be separated. Mrs. S mentioned she would encourage her children to attend universities in Korea so they could experience and live in their parent's home country.

Transnational Travels/Interactions

In this section, I discuss the mothers' experiences with transnational travels, interactions between the United States and Korea, and how they might have impacted the mothers and their children.

Transnational Travels

The mothers traveled to Korea for various reasons. Mrs. J, Mrs. S, and Mrs. K all reported that in the past they visited Korea regularly, although the frequency decreased as their children became school-aged. Mrs. Y reported few occasions of transnational travels or interaction with family or friends in Korea, especially because her parents lived in the United States mainly for the purpose of supporting her.

Travels between the United States and Korea impacted each of the mothers differently. Despite her indifferent attitude about living in the United States, Mrs. J's travel to Korea helped her life in the United States by enhancing her psychological well-being. Mrs. S and Mrs. K sent their children to Korea with a hope that they would learn Korean as they interacted with their relatives. The trips to Korea impacted their children's language learning in different ways. Mrs. K reported a significant increase in her first child's Korean proficiency, and her plan was to send her other children to Korea the following year. Mrs. S perceived that her son's visit to her sister's family in Korea did not necessarily improve his Korean language. Mike and his cousins interacted primarily in English because of patterns they established when the cousins stayed with his family in the United States during an earlier visit. Since the main purpose of the cousin's stay was to improve their English, Mrs. S did not force them to use Korean and this had a lingering influence on their subsequent interactions.

The extended visit of Mrs. S's sister and her children from Korea impacted Mrs. S's educational practices and language use of Mrs. S' children. Mrs. S viewed the Korean style of studying that her sister, nieces, and nephews practiced as positive.

Because of their influence, she started to send her children to the library, promoted reading books at home and enrolled them in *hagwons*. After their visit, Mrs. S remained dissatisfied with her children's stalled Korean language ability which she had hoped would improve.

Transnational Interaction

All the mothers in the study reported that they regularly spoke with family and friends in Korea. In most cases this meant that there was communication between the two countries. Mrs. Y was an exception probably because she was living with her parents and her siblings and did not feel the need to interact with people in Korea. Overall, their transnational interaction tended to be more with their family than with their friends, probably because the social ties from friendships subdued after being apart for many years. Transnational travels between Korea and the United States occurred across cases, but their impacts to the families varied. Notably, the travels and stays of extended family from Korea had different influences on the mothers and their children.

Transnational Media in Virtual Context

Various types of media connected the mothers with Korea, but the internet provided a wide range of possibilities for connecting with their country of origin. All the mothers except for Mrs. Y reported that they frequently watched Korean television and interacted with media products like online newspapers, magazines, and popular television shows. Mrs. K was most active and purposefully tapped into transnational media to provide educational support for her children. She used the content of these shows to motivate her children to learn up-to-date forms of Korean

language and culture. She tried to watch the most recent Korean shows as a family activity with the hope that the children could catch up with the language use in contemporary Korea.

Mrs. Y made the fewest trips to Korea, had the least amount of interaction with people in Korea, and utilized fewer Korean media products than other mothers. Her limited desire to interact with contemporary Korean culture and individuals living in Korea may have been a result of her family situation. Since her parents and sister lived with her in the United States there was less reason to contact family in Korea. In addition, she did not seem to maintain close social ties with friends in Korea probably because she had been in the United States for the longest period of time. As a young adult, she tried to immerse herself in American culture and network with her American peers. She has been exposed to and immersed in non-Korean culture and norms more than the other mothers. She seemed to be interested more in how she could feel comfortable in both American and Korean cultures than in maintaining her cultural and social ties back in Korea.

To conclude, the mothers were involved in transnational behaviors in different ways and to varying degrees. They arrived in United States with certain expectations about education and work. Each of them crossed cultural and territorial borders in different ways, involving their children with the intention of impacting their education and/or their language learning.

Discussion

Transnationalism can be helpful in understanding and analyzing Korean immigrant mothers' involvement in their children's education. In addition to physical

movements between a country of origin and a country of new settlement, transnationalism can occur without leaving the new country. For example, Mrs. Y was not involved in transnational activities as much as other mothers but she still possessed a transnational mindset such as when she compared her childhood and her son's.

Educational Practices Imported from Korea and Implemented in the U.S.

Private supplementary educational establishments in Korean communities, such as *hagwons*, private tutoring, and college admission/scholarship assistance, have become a part of Korean American experiences for many children who reside in areas with concentrated Korean population (J. J. Park, 2012; Zhou & Kim, 2006). In MD/DC/VA area alone, there are at least 83 number of *hagwons* listed in 2015 The Korea Times Washington D.C. Korean Business Directory (n.d.). Considering private tutoring that is advertised through word of mouth without those formal advertisements, the size of the private education services in the local area would be larger than the number on the list. With these resources available in Korean language, immigrant mothers utilized these services in order to support their children's academic achievement. Having these resources available distinguishes these mothers' experiences from other Korean immigrants with little to no access to the Korean ethnic economy.

Korean immigrant mothers' reliance on the private educational offerings were embedded in a transnational context. The *hagwons* that the mothers enrolled their children in were "mostly private businesses established and operated by Korean immigrant entrepreneurs to meet an ethnic-specific demand carried over from Korea"

(Zhou & Kim, 2006, p. 15). Korean immigrant mothers work hard to give their children a competitive edge educationally. They naturally looked for a tool that was familiar to them and transplanted it in the United States.

There exists a historical background to the Korean educational environment where private education has thrived. Given the highly competitive nature of Korean education and a wide range of private educational services to choose from, Korean mothers' responsibilities in "managing" children's education, such as gathering information and making decisions regarding private educational services, became a very important aspect of the mother's role (S. J. Park, 2012).

The Korean immigrant mothers in my study felt the need to support their children's education and made the extra efforts to get ahead in the U.S. context similar to what they would do in Korean contexts. However, because they were embedded in the culture of their new country, their challenges differed from what they would encounter in the Korean context. First, participants perceived that they had to compete with "American" families who spoke English at home. Mrs. S mentioned that minorities needed to study significantly more than children from mainstream families. She perceived blocked social mobility for minority groups in American society. Mrs. J and Mrs. K echoed the sentiment of being disadvantaged compared to English-speaking American families. Mrs. J, Mrs. K and Mrs. J quoted a *hagwon* instructor who said that Korean American children better not do sports as much as their "American" peers because they needed to spend more time studying in order to catch up with their "American" peers. Based on her experiences with tutoring Korean American children, Mrs. Y added that the lack of or limited exposure to

American history and politics place many Korean American children at a disadvantage when compared with “American” peers from families with more access to that content.

The mothers were constantly concerned about their children falling behind and as a result they constantly tried to supplement what they felt were disadvantages. Actually, the children of my participants overall were doing well in school academically. Their fears and concerns were not directed toward the present, but rather motivated by their projection into the future of what may or may not happen. The mothers perceived possible disadvantages in their children’s academic career and social mobility in the long run. At the same time, they did not acknowledge that they were privileged (i.e., upper-middle class) compared to other mothers. They seldom focused on how much they contributed to their children’s education. Their focus was on what they did not have.

The mothers’ experiences were also embedded in a racially stratified society evidenced in rather subtle ways. In response to the stereotypical images of Asian immigrant and Asian American mothers, Mrs. S defended the mothers by pointing out they were not the only parents who were aggressively involved in their children’s education. Mrs. K and Mrs. J were also quick to accept the hearsay that recent changes in admissions to the gifted and talented program were prompted by an over-representation of Asian American students in the program. In each of these examples, the mothers perceived that there existed some barrier that may work against their interest.

Transnational Perspectives in Understanding the Past and the Present

Transnationalism can provide a lens to help understand Korean immigrant mothers' experiences in the past and the present as well how their experiences are embedded in both Korean and American contexts. This contributes a more nuanced understanding of their experiences.

As Ogbu (1998) proposed about voluntary immigrants in his Cultural Ecological Theory of school performance, the mothers mostly showed positive attitudes toward American schools. Their pre-migration perspectives evolved from the images that Korean people had about the United States. The United States was imagined as a better place that provided better opportunities for career, higher education, and children's education (Abelmann & Lie, 1995; Min, 2013; Rhee, 2006). During the mid to late 90s when the mothers in this study first came to the United States, the country was regarded as a better place economically, politically, socially, culturally and educationally. Because foreign degrees had higher social prestige, the quality of education the United States offered was perceived as higher than Korea. Koreans moved to the United States in search of political freedom, better opportunities, and better educational opportunities for their children (Min, 2013). The existing educational context becomes an important factor in understanding the immigration of the mothers and their extended family members.

The mothers traveled to Korea quite regularly and interacted with families and friends Korea frequently. In this sense, a transnational perspective also allows us to understand some changes in contemporary Korean immigrant experiences. Although the United States was regarded as a better place by Korean immigrants who came to seek better opportunities for themselves and their children, their ideas about living in

the United States may change, or become more nuanced, as time passes. Mrs. S's positive comment about the "Korean style of studying" that her nieces carried over from Korea is one example of how she perceives Korea or the Korean way of doing things. While making a clear-cut distinction between Korean and American ways of doing things, she indicates that the U.S. way may not be the final outcome of immigrant acculturation and that immigrants can maintain their ways of doing things while incorporating into American society (K. Park, 2007; Son, 2015; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005). Immigrant experiences may not be a streamlined path toward assimilation into and acceptance of mainstream American society (Son, 2015). The four immigrant mothers in this study suggest that it is inherently and increasingly difficult to define what assimilation or the "American way" means.

One facet of transnationalism helps understand, describe, and analyze connections between the past and the present. Although Korean and U.S. education differ in terms of their culture and systems, Korean immigrant mothers in the study utilized the same strategies that Korean parents tend to use, i.e. purchasing private education for enrichment purposes, in the American educational setting. The idea that a child benefits from working hard at home, often by engaging in private tutoring and *hagwon*, was commonly shared and promoted by the mothers in the study. In addition, the mothers' experiences in Korea as they grew up was a basis for their current beliefs and practices regarding their educational support for their children. Mrs. J's relationship with her mother in the past determined her relationship with her children. Mrs. Y constantly reflected upon her upbringing experiences in Korea, as

well as her experiences as an international student in the U.S., as she discussed her parental experiences.

One distinct characteristic of the Korean immigrant mothers' involvement in the study was their priority of private supplementary education. I argue that the mothers understood and made sense of educational experiences of their children in the U.S. using their framework that was fundamentally influenced by their own experiences in Korea. Private educational services that they purchased, such as *hagwon*, academics-oriented summer camps, and private tutoring, was for an enrichment purpose, which has been considered as East-Asian specific phenomenon (Byun & Park, 2011). Utilizing private education for enrichment purposes is largely practiced among families in Korea to enhance their children's academic success. The mothers in the study maintained communication with family and friends in Korea and compared and contrasted involvement practices between Korea and the U.S. Thus, the findings of the present study show that Korean mothers conceptualized *hagwon* or supplementary education in preparation of the child's future classroom grade and thus to get ahead of their classmates, as it is understood in Korea. Also, the findings support the salience of the influence of both pre-migration experiences of immigrant parents and their continuing interactions as a means of shaping their educational beliefs and practices in the U.S.

While the findings of the present study suggest a clear connection between past experiences in Korea and present experiences in the U.S. of the mothers, they do not support that the culture and practices of the home country are equal to those of expatriates. The Korea that the mothers previously experienced changed. The context

of the pre-migration Korea was bound to their own lenses and perspectives that they used to interpret their reality. Thus, we need to consider the constantly changing nature of a society. Because the society, culture, and educational environment of Korea is always changing, Korean references that the mothers used and contemporary Korea may differ.

Summary

In this section, I juxtaposed Korean educational context and Korean immigrant mothers' experiences to highlight the utility of a transnational perspective. The mothers commonly felt a responsibility to provide extra academic support in addition to what the children did during the school day or the school-assigned homework. I interpret that their sense of responsibility and ownership in their children's education and their concerns about falling behind were carried from the Korean context. The mixture of educational contexts accentuated the mother's role in supporting their children's education. The mothers in my study held educational beliefs and practices that were ultimately embedded in the American context where they lived as racial and ethnic minorities, but privileged by their social class.

This chapter summarized the key findings of the study and discussed them in connection with literature. In the final chapter that follows, I draw conclusions from the current chapter and discuss implications of the present study. Suggestions for future research follow.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

I was motivated to embark on this research because I saw misconceptions, generalization and conflicting images about Korean immigrant mothers. I reviewed relevant literature in Chapter Two, and described how I designed and carried out the study in Chapter Three. Before moving on the findings, I provided my background and prior experiences vis-à-vis social class, race, ethnicity, language, immigration, and education because they influenced how I approached the study as well as the lens

that I used to collect, interpret and analyze the data. I introduced each mother and narrated their experiences with supporting their children's education in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, I summarized the findings according to themes and discussed how transnational perspective was salient in understanding and interpreting the mothers' experiences in context. In this chapter, I state how this study contribute to research and practice regarding Korean immigrant mothers and suggest future directions informed by the conclusions from the study.

The findings from the present study begin to demystify and dismantle shallow and simplistic understandings and images about Korean immigrant parents. In this section, I discuss how my study informs the research on Korean immigrant parents and the work of practitioners who work in communities with Korean immigrants.

Research on Korean Immigrant Parents

My study informs research on Korean immigrant parents in several ways. First, the study suggests that researchers need to focus more on understanding the agency of Korean immigrant parents. Second, the study supports the importance of understanding the varied and multiple contexts that impact the experiences of Korean immigrant parents. Third, the study supports that a transnational perspective allows for a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of immigrant mothers' experiences. All implications point to a need for an approach that attends to the within-group variability among Korean immigrant parents.

Agency

Some of the previous studies on Korean immigrant mothers' involvement with their children's education focused on barriers that the mothers faced, such as

language constraints, cultural differences and structural barriers (S. Lee, 2005; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Yang & McMullen, 2003). Despite the merits of the studies, there may be too much focus on the perceived constraints facing immigrant mothers undermining their agency, or their active engagement in their own decision making process. For instance, my study's findings suggest that the mothers made intentional and careful choices and decisions that maximized what was at their disposal. This shift of focus from constraints to agency moves away from viewing the mothers as mere objects of environmental forces and moves towards recognizing the interaction between the contexts and their agency and resources. The mothers were active participants in their own life choices and agents for their families making important decisions for the good of their children and themselves.

Contexts in the U.S.

In addition to the focus on their agency, multiplicity of the contexts is also important to consider in the work with Korean immigrant families. Putting a focus on the multiplicity of contexts reveals the complexity of their experiences that cannot be explained by utilizing only one factor or context. In the American context, race, ethnicity, and social class were salient in the immigrant mothers' experiences. As Asian Americans, the mothers were not free from the stereotypical image of Asian American parents who make their children practice placement tests for gifted and talented and magnet high schools. Some of the mothers had a sense of their minority status in terms of their race and immigration background. The realization was accompanied by an awareness of the disadvantages that their minority status could have in American society. However, they did not seem to have a critical awareness of

their class advantages. Although there was variability among the mothers' situations, their middle class background offered them access to outside-school educational resources, such as private supplementary educational services and their own ability to assist the children's educational activities.

Educational resources and ethnic social organizations such as churches and other religious establishments presented benefits as they performed mothers' roles. However, in some cases peer pressure from fellow Korean immigrant mothers also had negative impacts. Thus, race, ethnicity, and social class were salient in the mothers' experiences while at the same time their experiences were embedded in family, the local ethnic community, and the larger social contexts. Focusing on only one of the important factors gives incomplete picture of their experiences.

Transnational Context

The mothers' experiences were not only embedded in an American context. Based on the findings and discussions, I propose that the South Korean context existed in their past experiences and was also salient in their present lives. Parents' past experiences were factors that determined parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), and mobilizing and referencing past experiences when performing parenting roles seems to be human nature (Lightfoot, 2003). What makes this general aspect of human nature relevant in the cases of the Korean immigrant mothers in this study is that their past experiences occurred in a culturally and socially different context from where they raise their children. Moreover, the participants' lives were also continuously influenced by transnational interactions with people and culture in Korea. Made possible and accelerated by advances in transportation and technology,

physical and virtual crossovers of social and cultural borders are increasingly affordable and accessible. Their experiences reflected their lived realities of living in the two worlds simultaneously.

Finally, our understanding of Korean immigrant parent involvement is advanced by consideration of the structural context of Korean education. The mothers' past experiences in Korea were not only embedded in its cultural environment but they were also situated in structural factors in Korea, such as the deeply-rooted educational credentialism that placed excessive values on academic credentials, the highly stratified higher education system, the highly competitive college admission process, a thriving private education market and government policies regulating and deregulating private education industry (S. J. Park, 2012; Seth, 2012). Considering this structural context in Korea allows us to have more nuanced and contextualized understandings of Korean immigrant mothers' parental experiences in the United States.

Cultural Ecological Theory

The findings of the present study suggest limitations of the voluntary and involuntary dichotomy of CET in explaining variabilities and complexities of experiences within and across immigrant subgroups. CET argues that voluntary immigrants do not experience discrimination as frequently as involuntary immigrants, which results in positive attitudes towards schools and the host society. My findings show that Korean immigrant mothers still believed their children needed to "work hard" in response to perceptions of discrimination. Although the mothers immigrated to this country voluntarily, it does not necessarily mean that they accepted American

education without question. Rather, their efforts to provide academic support in a form of supplementary educational services show their perception of inequality present in American society and education. The mothers perceived the need for their children to be academically competitive in order to have the same return for their efforts as natives. To summarize, a strong work ethic or positive attitudes toward the schools and society does not provide nuanced explanations on the mothers' perceived disadvantages of U.S. society and their children's schools as well as their efforts to invest in their children's education as a means to address those disadvantages, as other scholars have argued (Sue and Okazaki, 1995).

CET is also limited in explaining detailed within-group variability among Korean Americans. As Ogbu and Simons (1998) acknowledged the purpose of their theory was to explain the overall varying academic outcomes of different minority groups in relation to their orientation to education and attitudes toward the society and schools. The Korean immigrant mothers' emphasis on education was actualized as a viable support when it was coupled with resources available in Korean ethnic economy, such as *hagwons*. However, not all the mothers in the study were able to afford private education for their children. Thus, the extent to which private education was utilized depended upon the financial stability of the immigrant family (Lew, 2006).

When school administrators, teachers, and policy makers engage with immigrant parents, in-depth knowledge of their home countries' cultural practices and beliefs surrounding education should be prioritized. The Korean immigrant mothers in this study may not be involved in traditional U.S. school activities, but they were

heavily involved in their children's academic development outside school walls. Without understanding what occurs at home and outside school contexts it is difficult to have a holistic understanding of immigrant parents' beliefs and practices. The immigrant parents' ways may not be familiar to and congruent with what teachers and administrators think but many of them are involved in their children's education in ways that maximize the resources that they have.

Parent Involvement Frameworks and Partnership Models

Dominant parent involvement and partnership frameworks do not pay enough attention on immigrant parents' experiences. School-centered definitions of parent involvement should be updated to include immigrant parents' practices, many of which occur outside school walls. The findings of my study suggest that the parents' life contexts and prior experiences, one of the main factors that influence parents' role construction (Hoover-Dempsey et al.), need to be more elaborated more in order to reflect the complexities of immigrant parents' experiences. A transnational perspective that looks both at their past experiences in Korea and continuing transnational interactions can highlight the complexity of the parents' frames of reference. We should be cautious not to create a list of narrow and fixed generalizations when understanding a culture (i.e. Korean culture or Korean educational culture in this study) because people experience the system differently according to their contexts.

Some Reservations

While transnational perspectives are useful tools to interpret and contextualize the mothers' experiences, its exact impact on the mothers' everyday lives was varied

and not explicitly clear in the present study. Although the mothers' experiences and how they made sense of them were embedded in transnational context, they were not necessarily engaged in transnational activities on a daily basis. Given my own experiences with transnationalism, I expected to see higher levels of engagement across cases. Their more limited daily engagement in transnational activities was possibly due to the differences observed between my own status and theirs. I do not have family here and my transnational involvement might be greater because I still have family and friends with whom I keep in touch in Korea. In addition, the mothers were much more settled in the United States than I am; they have their spouses, children, jobs and houses. Therefore, they have far deeper connections to their communities and contexts here than I have.

To conclude, the present study informs research on Korean immigrant mothers by supporting the following: putting more focus on agency of Korean immigrant mothers, consideration of multiple contexts that they were embedded in, and usefulness of transnationalism in developing a nuanced understanding their experiences. Based on my findings, Cultural Ecological Theory (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) could be updated by applying transnational perspectives adding the continuous salience of country of origin as immigrants incorporate into their new country.

Practice

The present study suggests ways in which teachers and administrators can approach immigrant mothers in a more meaningful and affirming way. Focusing on a deficit view or what the mothers do not have, (e.g., English proficiency, communication skills, cultural savvy), drawn from a perspective that centralizes

White, middle-class, English speaking norms and relegates others into expected behaviors, has been present American schools (Tyack, 1974). Focusing on what the mothers do possess such as language, cultural and other resources, can shift the deficit perspective about immigrant parents to one that acknowledges the richness present in their culture and transnational resources, such as in funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Guo (2006, 2011) made useful practical suggestions for incorporating home culture and language into school curriculum and parent activities. Guo (2006, 2011) suggested that children can interview their grandparents in their home language and report back to the class on their rich culture and historical background or partnering with English speaking, immigrant parents can come to school and read books in their home language.

Acknowledging and respecting the role of contexts is crucial as teachers and administrators engage with Korean immigrant mothers. How the mothers approach their children's education is embedded in their past experiences in Korea (particularly its educational environment), their social position as minority immigrants in the United States, and their ongoing transnational engagement with Korea. Although they experience commonalities based on their shared contexts, the beliefs and experiences of the participants in the study were complex and diverse.

To teachers and administrators, as well as teacher educators of pre-service and in-service teachers, this study demonstrates that they should use caution before they make assumptions about any group of people based on their cultural/racial/ethnic affiliation. Of course, educators cannot learn every language and every family culture of each student, but it is possible to develop a mindset that responds with sensitivity

to backgrounds and diverse life contexts of the children and their families. Classroom teachers should use caution before assuming a Korean American child would speak Korean language because their home language use can vary. When interacting with Korean immigrant mothers, teachers and administrators should consider their social class backgrounds, employment status, and childcare support from other family members, before making an assumption about their parental support.

Emerging Questions and Future Directions

My study has not only provided insights and answers to my research questions, but also revealed the need to learn more about immigrant mothers especially Korean mothers. Overall, comparing and contrasting with other racial and ethnic minority groups will highlight the significance of ethnicity and race in immigrant experiences. It also illuminates important suggestions for research pertaining to Korean immigrant mothers.

It is important to describe and analyze within-group variability among parents from Korean descent. I call for more studies to be conducted on the role of social class background, specifically regarding how Korean immigrant mothers from different socioeconomic backgrounds interact with school system, teachers, and the local ethnic educational resources. The differences between Korean immigrant mothers who work full-time, work part-time or not at all are worthy of investigation. Mothers' involvement within and beyond schools will vary according to the factors including time and financial freedom. Whether and how the childrearing responsibilities are shared with other family members deserves research attention, as well.

Also, the role of proximity to Korean community needs to be studied more. Higher proportions of English-only families in non-gateway cities, or non-major destinations of Korean immigrant settlement (Min & Kim, 2013), suggests differences in childrearing and heritage language maintenance. Also, as evidenced in Washington County an abundance of private supplementary educational services in the local Korean community is an important educational resource available to immigrant parents.

Generational differences and time of immigration are another important factor to consider for future research agendas on this or related topics. Research related to the extent of differences in educational beliefs between first generation and 1.5 or later generation Korean American mothers and how the beliefs impact parenting deserves greater attention. Studies in this line of inquiry would shed critical light on whether or not and how transnational contexts may impact different generations and test the influence of American acculturation on parenting. Studying generational differences would take into account Korean Americans who have experienced U.S. schools and possess linguistic and cultural knowledge. Adding complexity to a generational study of Korean mothers would be understanding why and when first generation immigrants immigrated (e.g., in graduate school, in college, or after college). Each of these variables influences the way Korean mothers interact with pre-migration and transnational experiences.

In the Korean educational context, parents' educational support reaches its peak when their children are in high school, particularly in *go sam* (12th grade) because of the emphasis put on preparing for college admission. Taking into account

the highly stratified university system in Korea, how immigrant mothers understand American higher education system, how they prepare their own children for higher education, and which types of colleges Korean families tend to choose is an important area of inquiry. Research on different Korean student populations in higher education (e.g., international students, native-born students, early study-abroad students) will contribute to the development of effective support systems in high schools and higher education institutions that Korean students attend.

To understand the role of Korean mothers, more research into the transnational trends in Korean American communities is needed. Understanding how newcomers from Korea influence the existing Korean American communities and how they provide support to children's academic/educational development is crucial in understanding Korean mothers' roles. The role of ethnic church holds an important implication for transnationalism. Many recently arrived immigrants seek out help asking for information from church communities. It is also a place where educational information is exchanged via a close network of mothers. We also need more research on the influences of transnational visits and extended stay from Korea relatives, as well as of an increasing number of Korean students who visit the United States for summer academic enrichment programs run by *hagwons*. Finally, the role of media such as the influence and usage of smartphone and social network services (SNS) among Korean immigrant and Korean American communities will illustrate the complexity of being an immigrant in the 21st century. With a smartphone or any internet-accessible device one can easily follow news and popular culture made in Korea. The same technology allows interaction with people in Korea with increasing

convenience. This means that Korean immigrant parents would have easier access to beliefs and values in contemporary Korea. Whether and how those interactions influence the beliefs and practices of the immigrant parents are still yet known.

Conclusions

Overall, regarding how families provide educational supports for their children, the present study found that considerable variability exists within the Korean immigrant population. The four Korean immigrant mothers in the study shared several commonalities such as their education level, social class background, residential location, time of arrival, and length of stay in the United States. While they were all committed to providing educational support for their children, their parenting experiences also varied across cases. The role of multiple contexts was salient in their varied experiences. Culture only could not explain their experiences, but race, social class, immigration, language and other contextual factors needed to be considered for more nuanced and accurate understanding of the mothers' beliefs and behaviors. In addition, transnationalism was a useful tool to interpret and contextualize the mothers' experiences before and after their migration to the United States although its impact on the mothers' everyday experiences needs more examination. I conclude that Korea exists in the past, present, and future in the mothers' experiences.

This study does not aim to draw generalizations about Korean immigrant mothers. While the data of the study included character building, emotional growth and other aspects of the mothers' beliefs, I highlighted their academic support in this study. I caution that the academic focus in the present study should not be used to

reinforce the stereotypical image of Korean immigrant mothers as excessively focused on academics. I also caution that the description of the mothers in the study may not reinforce cultural essentialism that ascribes static characteristics to a group of people. After all, the mothers in the study, and I, are all human beings each of whom has her own history. We change and evolve, and may act differently according to the situations or contexts we are in. As such, our lives deserve to be seen and understood from an inclusive and holistic perspective that takes into account the situated and embedded nature of our experiences.

Appendices

Appendix A: Background Information Sheet (English)

1. Name: _____
2. Age (Year of birth): _____
3. Occupation: _____
 - 3-1. Spouse's occupation: _____
4. Marital status: Married ____ Separated ____ Divorced ____ Widowed ____
5. Religion: _____
6. Place of birth: _____
7. Year came to the U.S.: _____
8. Years/months spent in the U.S.: ____ years and ____ months
9. Current city and state of residence: _____
10. City (or cities) lived in the U.S.: _____
11. English language proficiency: fluent ____ intermediate ____ beginning ____
12. Highest degree obtained or highest educational institution attended:
Middle School Diploma _ Some High School _ High School Diploma _
Some College _ Bachelor's Degree _ Some Graduate School _
Master's Degree or higher _
 - 12-1. Education level of spouse:
Middle School Diploma _ Some High School _ High School Diploma _
Some College _ Bachelor's Degree _ Some Graduate School _
Master's Degree or higher _
13. Have you ever been schooled in a foreign country?: Yes ____ No ____

If yes,

 - 13-1. In which country? _____
 - 13-2. When and for how long? From _____ to _____

14. Family Income Range (Check next to the category that best describes your yearly family income):

- a. Lower than \$22,350 _____
- b. \$22,351 - \$ 50,000 _____
- c. \$50,000 - \$100,000 _____
- d. Higher than \$100,000 _____

15. Family members living in the residence:

16. Grade (age) and gender of children:

17. How old was your child (or were your children) when they came to the United States?

- First child) Age of arrival: _____ or, U.S.-born: _____
Second child) Age of arrival: _____ or, U.S.-born: _____
Third child) Age of arrival: _____ or, U.S.-born: _____

18. Has any of your children been schooled in a country other than the U.S.?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes,

18-1. In which country? _____

18-2. When and for how long? From _____ to _____

18-3. In what grade level? From _____ to _____

Appendix B: Background Information Sheet (Korean)

1. 이름: _____

2. 나이 (태어난 년도): _____

3. 직업: _____

3-1. 배우자의 직업: _____

4. 결혼상태: 기혼 _____ 별거중 _____ 이혼 _____ 사별 _____

5. 종교: _____

6. 태어난 곳: _____

7. 미국에 온 년도: _____

8. 미국에서 산 기간: _____ 년 _____ 개월

9. 현재 거주하는 도시 및 주: _____

10. 이전에 거주했던 도시 및 주: _____

11. 영어 능력: 유창함 _____ 중간 _____ 초보수준 _____

12. 최종학력:

중졸 _____ 고등중퇴 _____ 고졸 _____ 대학중퇴 _____ 대졸 _____ 대학원 이상 _____

12-1. 배우자 최종학력:

중졸 _____ 고등중퇴 _____ 고졸 _____ 대학중퇴 _____ 대졸 _____ 대학원 이상 _____

13. 본인이 한국 이외의 나라에서 학교에 다니신 적이 있으십니까?:

예 ___ 아니오 ___

있으시다면,

13-1. 국가: _____

13-2. 기간: _____ 부터 _____ 까지

14. 가족 수입 정도(가장 가까운 범위를 선택하십시오):

a. \$22,350 이하 _____

b. \$22,351 - \$ 50,000 _____

c. \$50,000 - \$100,000 _____

d. \$100,000 이상 _____

15. 함께 살고 있는 가족:

16. 자녀의 학년(나이)과 성별

17. 자녀가 미국에 온 나이/미국 출생 여부

a. 첫째 아이) 미국에 온 나이: _____ 미국 출생: _____

b. 둘째 아이) 미국에 온 나이: _____ 미국 출생: _____

c. 셋째 아이) 미국에 온 나이: _____ 미국 출생: _____

18. 자녀가 미국 이외의 나라에서 학교에 다닌 적이 있습니까?:

예 ___ 아니오 ___

있다면,

13-3. 국가: _____

13-4. 기간: _____ 부터 _____ 까지

Appendix C. Interview Protocol

General understanding of their parenting experiences

1. What does “education” “schooling” and “parent involvement” mean to you?
2. What do you do to support your child(ren)’s schooling?
3. What do you expect for your child(ren)’s schooling?
4. What future do you picture for your child(ren)?
5. What do you think is the best way to support your child(ren)’s schooling in the U.S.?
 - a. Where did you learn it?
6. How would you describe an ideal mother from your perspective?
7. Does an ideal mother in the U.S. differ from an ideal mother in Korea?

Korean mothers

1. Can you describe a “typical” Korean mother in the U.S.? Is she different from you? What are your thoughts about the “typical” Korean mother?
2. Are Korean mothers different from other mothers?
3. Where do you obtain educational information? (fellow mothers, ethnic media, word of mouth, ...)
4. Do you associate with non-Korean mothers? Why or why not?

American schools and Korean schools

1. How would you describe your own schooling experience as a student in Korea? (Probes: Did you like to go to school? What would be different if you did not go to [college, high school])?
2. What made you come to the U.S.? How important was your children’s education in making the decision to migrate? (Probes: How did you feel about it? Did your life change a lot after coming to the U.S.?)
3. What did you expect about U.S. schools before you came here? Do you still hold the expectations? Have they changed? Why?
4. Did you do anything to prepare for the schooling of your children before you came?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Korean and U.S. schools from your perspective?
6. Is it different to be a parent in the U.S. from to be a parent in Korea?
7. Do you talk to your friends who are mothers in Korea? What are they doing to support their children’s education?
8. Imagine you were still in Korea. What would it be like to be a parent in Korea? Would it be different from your current experience as a parent?

Relationship with school, teachers and administrators

1. Have you visited your child(ren)’s school recently? What did you think about the experience? How did you feel? (Probes: Did you feel welcomed? Did you feel comfortable with talking with the teacher/staff?)
2. How would you describe an ideal teacher from your point of view? (Probes: Did you have a favorite teacher when you were a student?)
3. What do you think about your child(ren)’s school/teachers/administrators?

4. What are the challenges that you face when you try to support your children's schooling? (Probes: What are the challenges when you try to interact with the school/teachers/administrators?)
5. How do you tackle those challenges? (Probes: Who do you turn to when you need help with this matter?)

Language

1. What language do you use to communicate with your child(ren)?

Appendix D. Example of Coding (Transcript)

Transcript #5-1 (3-26-2014) 17

구술자: 예~ 할상 숙제 해논 거 검사해주고, 예~ 답 맞게 했는지 체크해주고...

면담자: 그럴 큰 애 숙제도 봐주세요?

구술자: 큰 애 숙제는 지가 알아서, 애는 이제 그런 거 검사 맡기 싫어해요. 이제 좀 커서 그런지 근데 이제 수학 문제 풀다가 어렵거나 모른다 그러면 이제 좀 도와주고 그리고 학습지 같은 건 아빠가 시키는 거 그런 거 풀면서 제가 좀 도와주고

학습지는... 좀 미리~한 배운 것들을 좀 미리~하게 하거든요. 그런 것 좀 도와주고 그리고 책, 아~ 저는 그 vocab 때문에 아주 걱정이예요. 지금.

면담자: 세 명 다요? 아니면 큰 애만?

구술자: 이 꼬맹이들은 그냥, 요즘 컴퓨터 프로그램 많이 책 읽는 거 많잖아요. 그거 보면서 책을 자기들이 읽고 아직까지는 reading, writing에 큰 문제는 없는 데, 이제 커갈수록 좀 더 많이 하겠조. 어려웠지겠조. 큰 애는 이제 9학년이니까 벌써... 책을 많이 읽어서, 뭐 이런 시기는 지난 거 같고 이제 뭐 vocab 많이 키워주고 문제푸는 스킬을 많이 키울 수 있는 걸 해야 할 것 같아요. 별로 책을 안 좋아해요. 어릴 때부터 책을 안 좋아해서 억지로 억지로 막 책 읽고 막 그러가지고 애들 학교에서 숙제가 항상 25분씩 책 읽는 게 숙제예요. 숙제에 항상 포함되어 있어요. elementary는... 어린 선생님이냐에 따라서 40분 읽으라는 선생님도 있고, 애비들은 25분 이렇게 읽으라고 하는데, 정말 25분을 다 읽어야 되는데 시작해서 막 놓구 아~ 25분 됐다 이렇게하고 제대로 안 읽고 그것두 옆에서 지키고 있어야 되는데, 그게 항상 마음이 아프조. 막 일하고 오면은 저녁 정겨우다보면 저도 피곤해가지고 '했나~ 그대 됐다~' 그러구 말구 그러다 어찌다 날 잡아가지고 숙제해놓은 걸 이렇게 하다보면 이제 흐트러는 거조. 뭐 배민가 이런거... 어떻게 했는지...

면담자: 그럼 숙제검사하고 저녁먹고 그리고 또 저녁에는 어떻게 시간 보내세요?

구술자: 저녁에는 뭐 책 읽으라고 하고... (인터뷰 중 아이가 방 문을 열어서 잠시 대화 중단 00:38:45-57) 뭐 원칙은 월요일부터 목요일까지는 TV도 안되고 뭐 이런 것도 안 되고 근데 인터넷, 컴퓨터는 어쩔 수 없는 게 숙제가 또

concern

manager mom
tutor mom

Academics - expectation
↑
Anxiety (?)
under the surface

I need to monitor them doing homework assignment, but I can't. my friend's parents (Coresides).

Appendix E. Example of Coding (ATLAS.ti)

Project Edit Documents Quotations Codes Memos Networks Analysis Tools Views Windows Help

P-Docs P1: Transcript #5-1

Quotations P1: Transcript #5-1

Codes Mom: feelings (29:0)

Memos '미안해요' (3-Co) - Super

Primary Documents

Id	Name
P1	Transcript #5-1
P2	Transcript #5-2
P5	Field note #5-1
P6	Field note #5-1
P7	Field note #5-2

Search

Codes

Search

Name

- Mom: career
- Mom: educational experience
- Mom: feelings
- Mom: LING: English~
- Mom: personality
- Mom: pre-migration
- peers (K) - '길을 정해서 이...
- peers (K) - '다 학주는 부모...
- peers (K) - '시키는 엄마들'
- peers (K) - '인상 쓰는 엄마...
- peers (K) - '애들이 공부 잘 ...
- peers (K) - '지말바람'
- peers (K) - '한국말들을'
- peers (non-Korean)~
- perceptions about AM scho...
- race

P1: Transcript #5-1 -> @ Transcript #5-1

Size: 100% Rich Text Default

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